

S E R M O N S

ON SEVERAL

SUBJECTS *and* OCCASIONS,

By the most Reverend

Dr. JOHN TILLOTSON,

L A T E

Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury*.

VOLUME *the* THIRD.

L O N D O N :

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S E R M O N XXXV.

Of the eternity of hell torments.

Preached before the Queen at Whitehall,
March 7. 16⁸⁹/₉₀.

M A T T H. xxv. 46.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

AMONG all the arguments to repentance and a good life, those have the greatest force and power upon the minds of men, which are fetch'd from another world, and from the final state of good and bad men after this life. And this our SAVIOUR represents to us in a most lively manner, in that prospect which, in the latter part of this chapter, he gives us of the judgment of the great day, namely, that at the end of the world the *Son of man shall come in his glory, with his holy angels, and shall sit upon the throne of his glory; and all nations shall be gathered before him, and shall be separated into two great companies, the righteous and the wicked; who shall stand the one on the right hand, and the other on the left of this great judge; who shall pronounce sentence severally upon them according to the actions which they have done in this life: the righteous shall be rewarded with eternal happiness, and the wicked shall be sentenced to everlasting punishment. And these, that is the wicked, shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*

The words are plain and need no explication. For I take it for granted, that every one, at first hearing of them, does clearly apprehend the difference between the

righteous and the wicked, and between endless happiness and misery: but although these words be so very easy to be understood, they can never be too much considered by us. The scope and design of them is, to represent to us the different fates of good and bad men in another world, and that their ends there will be as different as their ways and doings have been here in this world: the serious consideration whereof is the greatest discouragement to sin, and the most powerful argument in the world to a holy and virtuous life: because it is an argument taken from our greatest and most lasting interest, our happiness or our misery to all eternity: a concernment of that vast consequence, that it must be the greatest stupidity and folly in the world for any man to neglect it.

This eternal state of rewards and punishments in another world, our blessed SAVIOUR hath clearly revealed to us. And as to one part of it, viz. that good men shall be eternally happy in another world, every one gladly admits it: but many are loth that the other part should be true, concerning the eternal punishment of wicked men. And therefore they pretend that it is contrary to the justice of GOD to punish temporary crimes with eternal torments: because justice always observes a proportion between offences and punishments; but between temporary sins and eternal punishments there is no proportion. And as this seems hard to be reconciled with justice, so much more with that excess of goodness which we suppose to be in GOD.

And therefore they say, that though GOD seem to have declared that impenitent sinners shall be everlastingly punished, yet these declarations of scripture are so to be mollified and understood, as that we may be able to reconcile them with the essential perfections of the divine nature.

This is the full force and strength of the objection. And my work at this time shall be to clear, if I can, this difficult point. And that for these two reasons. First, for the vindication of the divine justice and goodness: *that GOD may be justified in his sayings, and appear righteous when he judgeth.* And secondly, because

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the belief of the threatnings of GOD in their utmost extent is of so great moment to a good life, and so great a discouragement to sin: for the sting of sin is the terror of eternal punishment; and if men were once set free from the fear and belief of this, the most powerful restraint from sin would be taken away.

So that in answer to this objection, I shall endeavour to prove these two things.

First, that the eternal punishment of wicked men in another world is plainly threatned in scripture.

Secondly, that this is not inconsistent either with the justice or the goodness of GOD.

First, that the eternal punishment of wicked men in another world is plainly threatned in scripture, namely, in these following texts, Matth. xviii. 8. *It is better for thee to enter into life halt and maimed, than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.* And Matth. xxv. 41. *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* And here in the text, *these*, that is the wicked, *shall go away into everlasting punishment.* And Mark ix. It is there three several times with great vehemency repeated by our SAVIOUR, *where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.* And 2 Thess. i. 9. speaking of them that know not GOD, and obey not the gospel of his Son, it is said of them, *who shall be punished with everlasting destruction.*

I know very well that great endeavour hath been used to avoid the force of these texts, by shewing that the words, for ever and everlasting, are frequently used in scripture in a more limited sense, only for a long duration and continuance. Thus, for ever, doth very often in the old testament only signify for a long time and till the end of the jewish dispensation. And in the epistle of St. Jude, verse 7th, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are said to be *set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*; that is, of a fire that was not extinguished till those cities were utterly consumed.

And therefore to clear the meaning of the forementioned texts, first, I shall readily grant, that the words, for ever and everlasting, do not always in scripture signify

an endless duration; and that this is sufficiently proved by the instances alledged to this purpose. But then, secondly, it cannot be denied on the other hand, that these words are often in scripture used in a larger sense, and so as necessarily to signify an interminable and endless duration. As where eternity is attributed to GOD, and he is said to *live for ever and ever*: and where eternal happiness in another world is promised to good men, and that *they shall be for ever with the LORD*. Now the very same words and expressions are used concerning the punishment of wicked men in another life, and there is great reason why we should understand them in the same extent: both because if GOD had intended to have told us that the punishment of wicked men shall have no end, the languages wherein the scriptures are written do hardly afford fuller and more certain words, than those that are used in this case, whereby to express to us a duration without end: and likewise, which is almost a peremptory decision of the thing, because the duration of the punishment of wicked men is in the very same sentence expressed by the very same word which is used for the duration of the happiness of the righteous: as is evident from the text, *these*, speaking of the wicked, *shall go away, eis κόλασιν αἰώνιον, into eternal punishment, but the righteous, eis ζωὴν αἰώνιον, into life eternal*. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed; namely, to shew that this is not inconsistent either with the justice or the goodness of GOD. For in this the force of the objection lies. And it hath been attempted to be answered several ways, none of which seems to me to give clear and full satisfaction to it.

First, it is said by some, that because sin is infinite in respect of the object against whom it is committed, which is GOD, therefore it deserves an infinite punishment.

But this I doubt will upon examination be found to have more of subtlety than of solidity in it. 'Tis true indeed, that the dignity of the person against whom an offence is committed is a great aggravation of the fault. For which reason all offences against GOD are certainly the greatest of all other. But that crimes should hereby be heightened to an infinite degree can by no means be

admitted; and that for this plain reason; because then the evil and demerit of all sins must necessarily be equal; for the demerit of no sin can be more than infinite: and if the demerit of all sins be equal, there can then be no reason for the degrees of punishment in another world: but to deny that there are degrees of punishment there, is not only contrary to reason, but to our SAVIOUR'S express assertion, that some shall be *beaten with many stripes* and some with *fewer*, and that it shall be *more tolerable for some in the day of judgment* than for others. Besides, that by the same reason that the least sin that is committed against God may be said to be infinite because of its object, the least punishment that is inflicted by God may be said to be infinite because of its author; and then all punishments from God as well as all sins against him would be equal; which is palpably absurd. So that this answer is by no means sufficient to break the force of this objection.

Secondly, it is said by others, that if wicked men lived for ever in this world they would sin for ever, and therefore they deserve to be punished for ever. But this hath neither truth nor reason enough in it to give satisfaction. For who can certainly tell that if a man lived never so long he would never repent and grow better?

Besides, that the justice of God doth only punish the sins which men have committed in this life, and not those which they might possibly have committed if they had lived longer.

Thirdly, it is said in the last place, that God hath set before men everlasting happiness and misery, and the sinner hath his choice. Here are two things said which seem to bid fairly towards an answer.

First, that the reward which God promiseth to our obedience is equal to the punishment which he threatens to our disobedience. But yet this I doubt will not reach the business: because though it be not contrary to justice to exceed in rewards, that being matter of mere favour; yet it may be so, to exceed in punishments.

Secondly, it is further said, that the sinner in this case has nothing to complain of, since he hath his own choice. This I confess is enough to silence the sinner, and to

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make him to acknowledge that his destruction is of himself; but yet for all that, it does not seem so clearly to satisfy the objection from the disproportion between the fault and the punishment.

And therefore I shall endeavour to clear, if it may be, this matter yet a little further by these following considerations.

First, let it be considered, that the measure of penalties with respect to crimes is not only, nor always, to be taken from the quality and degree of the offence, much less from the duration and continuance of it, but from the ends and reasons of government; which require such penalties as may, if it be possible, secure the observation of the law, and deter men from the breach of it. And the reason of this is evident, because if it were once declared that no man should suffer longer for any crime than according to the proportion of the time in which it was committed, the consequence of this would be, that sinners would be better husbands of their time, and sin so much the faster, that they might have the better bargain of it, and might satisfy for their sins by a shorter punishment.

And it would be unreasonable likewise upon another account; because some of the greatest sins may perhaps be committed in the shortest time; for instance, murder; might the act whereof may be over in a moment, but the effects of it are perpetual. For he that kills a man, he once kills him for ever. The act of murder may be committed in a trice, but the injury is endless and irreparable. So that this objection of temporary crimes being punished with so much longer sufferings is plainly of no force.

Besides that, whoever considers how ineffectual the threatning even of eternal torments is to the greatest part of sinners, will soon be satisfied that a less penalty than that of eternal sufferings would, to the far greatest part of mankind, have been in all probability of little or no force. And therefore if any thing more terrible than eternal vengeance could have been threatned to the workers of iniquity, it had not been unreasonable, because

him- cause it would all have been little enough to deter men
ly to effectually from sin.

So that what proportion crimes and penalties ought
to bear to each other, is not so properly a considera-
tion of justice, as of wisdom and prudence in the law-
giver.

And the reason of this seems very plain, because the
measure of penalties is not taken from any strict propor-
tion betwixt crimes and punishments; but from one
great end and design of government, which is to secure
the observation of wholsom and necessary laws; and con-
sequently whatever penalties are proper and necessary to
this end are not unjust.

And this consideration I desire may be more especially
observed, because it strikes at the very foundation of the
objection. For if the appointing and apportioning of pe-
nalties to crimes be not so properly a consideration of ju-
stice, but rather of prudence in the lawgiver; then what-
ever the disproportion may be between temporary sins and
eternal sufferings justice cannot be said to be concerned
in it.

Justice indeed is concerned, that the righteous and the
wicked should not be treated alike; and farther yet, that
greater sins should have a heavier punishment, and that
mighty sinners should be mightily tormented; but all
this may be considered and adjusted in the degree and
the intenseness of the suffering, without making any dif-
ference in the duration of it.

The case then in short stands thus. Whenever we
break the laws of God we fall into his hands and lie at
his mercy, and he may without injustice inflict what pu-
nishment upon us he pleaseth: and consequently, to se-
cure his law from violation, he may beforehand threaten
what penalties he thinks fit and necessary to deter men
from the transgression of it. And this is not esteemed
unjust among men, to punish crimes that are committed
or not an instant with the perpetual loss of estate, or liberty,
or life.

Secondly, this will yet appear more reasonable when
we consider, that after all, he that threatens hath still
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the power of execution in his own hands. For there is this remarkable difference between promises and threatenings, that he who promiseth passeth over a right to another, and thereby stands obliged to him in justice and faithfulness to make good his promise; and if he do not, the party to whom the promise is made is not only disappointed but injuriously dealt withal: but in threatening it is quite otherwise. He that threatens keeps the right of punishing in his own hand, and is not obliged to execute what he hath threatned any further than the reasons and ends of government do require: and he may without any injury to the party threatned remit and abate as much as he pleaseth of the punishment that he hath threatned: and because in so doing he is not worse but better than his word, no body can find fault, or complain of any wrong or injustice thereby done to him.

Nor is this any impeachment of God's truth and faithfulness, any more than it is esteemed among men a piece of falshood not to do what they have threatned. God did absolutely threaten the destruction of the city of Niniveh, and his peevish prophet did understand the threatening to be absolute, and was very angry with God for employing him in a message that was not made good. But God understood his own right, and did what he pleased notwithstanding the threatening he had denounced, and for all Jonah was so touched in honour that he had rather have died himself than that Niniveh should not have been destroyed, only to have verified his message.

I know it is said in this case, that God hath confirmed these threatenings by an oath, which is a certain sign of the immutability of his counsel; and therefore his truth is concerned in the strict and rigorous execution of them. The land of Canaan was a type of heaven, and the Israelites who rebelled in the wilderness were also a type of impenitent sinners under the gospel; consequently the oath of God concerning the rebellious Israelites, when he swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest, that is, into the land of Canaan, doth equally oblige him to execute his threatening upon all impenitent sinners under

the gospel, that *they shall never enter into the kingdom of God*. And this is very truly reasoned, so far as the threatening extends; which if we attend to the plain words of it, beyond which threatnings are never to be stretched, doth not seem to reach any further than to the exclusion of impenitent sinners out of heaven, and their falling finally short of the rest and happiness of the righteous: which, however, directly overthrows the opinion ascribed to Origen, that the devils and wicked men shall all be saved at last; *GOD having sworn in his wrath that they shall never enter into his rest*.

But then, as to the eternal misery and punishment threatened to wicked men in the other world, though it be not necessarily comprehended in this oath that *they shall not enter into his rest*; yet we are to consider, that both the tenor of the sentence which our blessed SAVIOUR hath assured us will be passed upon them at the judgment of the great day, *depart ye cursed into everlasting fire*; and likewise this declaration in the text, that *the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment*, though they do not restrain *GOD* from doing what he pleases, yet they cut off from the sinner all reasonable hopes of the relaxation or mitigation of them. For since the great judge of the world hath made so plain and express a declaration, and will certainly pass such a sentence, it would be the greatest folly and madness in the world for the sinner to entertain any hope of escaping it, and to venture his soul upon that hope.

I know but one thing more, commonly said upon this argument, that seems material, and that is this; that the words death and destruction and perishing, whereby the punishment of wicked men in the other world is most frequently expressed in scripture, do most properly import annihilation and an utter end of being; and therefore may reasonably be so understood in the matter of which we are now speaking.

To this I answer, that these words, and those which answer them in other languages, are often, both in scripture and other authors, used to signify a state of great misery and suffering, without the utter extinction of the miserable.

miserable. Thus GOD is often in scripture said to bring destruction upon a nation when he sends great judgments upon them, though they do not exterminate and make an utter end of them.

And nothing is more common in most languages, than by perishing to express a person's being undone and made very miserable. As in that known passage in Tiberius his letter to the Roman senate, * *let all the gods and goddeses, saith he, destroy me worse than at this very time I feel myself to perish*, &c. in which saying, the words, destroy and perish, are both of them used to express the miserable anguish and torment which at that time he felt in his mind, as Tacitus tells us at large.

And as for the word death; a state of misery, which is as bad or worse than death, may properly enough be called by that name: and for this reason the punishment of wicked men after the day of judgment is in the book of the revelation so frequently and fitly called *the second death*. And *the lake of fire*, into which the wicked shall be cast to be tormented in it, is expressly called *the second death*, Rev. xx. 14.

But besides this, they that argue from the force of these words, that the punishment of wicked men in the other world shall be nothing else but an utter end of their being, do necessarily fall into two great inconveniences.

First, that hereby they exclude all positive punishment and torment of sinners. For if the second death, and to be destroyed, and to perish, signify nothing else but the annihilation of sinners, and an utter extinction of their being; and if this be all the effect of that dreadful sentence which shall be passed upon them at the day of judgment, then the fire of hell is quenched all at once, and is only a frightful metaphor without any meaning. But this is directly contrary to the tenor of scripture, which doth so often describe the punishment of wicked men in

* Ita me dii deaque omnes pejùs perdant quàm hodie perire me sentio, &c.

hell by positive torments: and particularly our blessed SAVIOUR, describing the lamentable state of the damned in hell, expressly says, that *there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth*; which cannot be, if annihilation be all the meaning and effect of the sentence of the great day.

Secondly, another inconvenience of this opinion is, that if annihilation be all the punishment of sinners in the other world, then the punishment of all sinners must of necessity be equal, because there are no degrees of annihilation or not-being. But this also is most directly contrary to scripture, as I have already shewn.

I know very well that some who are of this opinion do allow a very long and tedious time of the most terrible and intolerable torment of sinners, and after that they believe that there shall be an utter end of their being.

But then they must not argue this from the force of the words before mentioned, because the plain inference from thence is, that annihilation is all the punishment that wicked men shall undergo in the next life; and if that be not true, as I have plainly shewn that it is not, I do not see from what other words or expressions in scripture they can find the least ground for this opinion, that the torment of wicked men shall at last end in their annihilation. And yet admitting all this, for which I think there is no ground at all in scripture, I cannot see what great comfort sinners can take in the thought of a tedious time of terrible torment, ending at last in annihilation, and the utter extinction of their beings.

Thirdly, we may consider further, that the primary end of all threatnings is not punishment, but the prevention of it. For GOD does not threaten that men may sin and be punished, but that they may not sin, and so may escape the punishment threatned. And therefore the higher the threatening runs, so much the more mercy and goodness there is in it; because it is so much the more likely to hinder men from incurring the penalty that is threatned.

Fourthly, let it be considered likewise, that when it is very plain that GOD hath threatned eternal misery to

impenitent sinners, all the prudence in the world obliges men to believe that he is in good earnest, and will execute these threatnings upon them, if they will obstinately stand it out with him, and will not be brought to repentance. And therefore in all reason we ought so to demean ourselves, and so to persuade others, as knowing the terror of the LORD, and that they who wilfully break his laws are in danger of eternal death. To which I will add in the

Fifth and last place, that if we suppose that GOD did intend that his threatnings should have their effect to deter men from the breach of his laws, it cannot be imagined that in the same revelation, which declares these threatnings, any intimation should be given of the abatement or non-execution of them. For by this GOD would have weakened his own laws, and have taken off the edge and terror of his threatnings: because a threatening hath quite lost its force, if we once come to believe that it will not be executed: and consequently, it would be a very impious design to go about to teach or persuade any thing to the contrary, and a betraying men into that misery, which had it been firmly believed might have been avoided.

We are all bound to preach, and you and I are all bound to believe the terrors of the LORD. Not so, as saucily to determine and pronounce what GOD must do in this case; for after all, he may do what he will, as I have clearly shewn: but what is fit for us to do, and what we have reason to expect, if notwithstanding a plain and express threatening of *the vengeance of eternal fire*, we still go on to *treasure up to ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of GOD*; and will desperately put it to the hazard whether, and how far GOD will execute his threatening upon sinners in another world.

And therefore there is no need why we should be very solicitously concerned for the honour of GOD's justice or goodness in this matter. Let us but take care to believe and avoid the threatnings of GOD; and then, how terrible soever they are, no harm can come to us. And

for GOD, let us not doubt but that he will take care of his own honour; and that he, *who is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works*, will do nothing that is repugnant to his eternal goodness and righteousness; and that he will certainly so manage things at the judgment of the great day, *as to be justified in his sayings, and to be righteous when we are judged*. For, notwithstanding his threatnings, he hath reserved power enough in his own hands to do right to all his perfections: so that we may rest assured, that he will *judge the world in righteousness*; and if it be any wise inconsistent either with righteousness or goodness, which he knows much better than we do, to make sinners miserable for ever, that he will not do it; nor is it credible, that he would threaten sinners with a punishment which he could not justly execute upon them.

Therefore sinners ought always to be afraid of it, and reckon upon it: and always to remember, that there is great goodness and mercy in the severity of GOD's threatnings; and that nothing will more justify the infliction of eternal torments, than the foolish presumption of sinners in venturing upon them, notwithstanding such plain and terrible threatnings.

This, I am sure, is a good argument to all of us, to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*; and with all possible care to endeavour the prevention of that misery which is so terribly severe, that at present we can hardly tell how to reconcile it with the justice and goodness of GOD.

This GOD heartily desires we would do, and hath solemnly sworn, that *he hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live*. So that here is all imaginable care taken to prevent our miscarriage, and all the assurance that the GOD of truth can give us of his unwillingness to bring this misery upon us. And both these, I am sure, are arguments of great goodness. For what can goodness do more, than to warn us of this misery, and earnestly persuade us to prevent it; and to threaten us so very terribly, on purpose to deter us from so great a danger?

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And if this will not prevail with us, but we will still go on to *despise the riches of God's goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance*; what in reason remains for us, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume us? And what almost can justice, or even goodness itself do less, than to inflict that punishment upon us, which with eyes open we would wilfully run upon; and which no warning, no persuasion, no importunity could prevail with us to avoid? And when, as the apostle says, *knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death*; yet for all that, we would venture to commit them.

And therefore, whatever we suffer, we do but inherit our own choice, and have no reason to complain of God, who hath set before us life and death, eternal happiness and misery, and hath left us to be the carvers of our own fortune: and if, after all this, we obstinately refuse this happiness, and wilfully run upon this misery, *wo unto us! for we have rewarded evil to ourselves.*

You see then, by all that hath been said upon this argument, what we have all reason to expect, if we will still go on in our sins, and will not be brought to repentance. You have heard what a terrible punishment the just God hath threatened to the workers of iniquity: and that in as plain words as can be used to express any thing. *These, that is the wicked, shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*

Here are life and death, happiness and misery set before us. Not this frail and mortal life, which is hardly worth the having, were it not in order to a better and happier life; nor a temporal death, to get above the dread whereof should not methinks be difficult to us, were it not for the bitter and terrible consequences of it: but an eternal life, and an eternal enjoyment of all things which can render life pleasant and happy; and a perpetual death, which will for ever torment us, but never make an end of us.

These God propounds to our choice: and if the consideration of them will not prevail with us to leave our sins,

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sins, and to reform our lives, what will? Weightier motives cannot be proposed to the understanding of man, than everlasting punishment, and life eternal; than the greatest and most durable happiness, and the most intolerable and lasting misery that human nature is capable of.

Now, considering in what terms the threatenings of the gospel are expressed, we have all the reason in the world to believe that the punishment of sinners in another world will be everlasting. However, we cannot be certain of the contrary, time enough to prevent it: not till we come there, and find by experience how it is: and if it prove so, it will then be too late either to prevent that terrible doom, or to get it reversed.

Some comfort themselves with the uncomfortable and uncertain hope of being discharged out of being, and reduced to their first nothing: at least after the tedious and terrible suffering of the most grievous and exquisite torments for innumerable ages. And if this should happen to be true, good God! how feeble, how cold a comfort is this? Where is the reason and understanding of men, to make this their last refuge and hope; and to lean upon it as a matter of mighty consolation, that they shall be miserable beyond all imagination, and beyond all patience, for God knows how many ages? *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?* No right sense and judgment of things? No consideration and care of themselves, no concernment for their own lasting interest and happiness?

Origen, I know not for what good reason, is said to have been of opinion, that the punishment of devils and wicked men, after the day of judgment, will continue but for a thousand years; and that after that time, they shall all be finally saved. I can very hardly persuade myself, that so wise and learned a man as Origen was should be positive in an opinion for which there can be no certain ground in reason, especially for the punctual and precise term of a thousand years; and for which there is no ground at all, that I know of, from divine revelation.

But upon the whole matter, however it be ; be it for a thousand years, or be it for a longer and unknown term, or be it for ever, which is plainly threatned in the gospel : I say, however it be, this is certain, that it is infinitely wiser to take care to avoid it, than to dispute it, and to run the final hazard of it. Put it which way we will, especially if we put it at the worst, as in all prudence we ought to do, it is by all possible means to be provided against : So terrible, so intolerable is the thought, yea, the very least suspicion of being miserable for ever.

And now give me leave to ask you, as St. Paul did king Agrippa, *Do you believe the scriptures?* And I hope I may answer for you myself, as he did for Agrippa, *I know you do believe them.* And in them these things are clearly revealed, and are part of that creed of which we make a solemn profession every day.

And yet when we consider how most men live, is it credible that they do firmly believe this plain declaration of our SAVIOUR and our judge, that *the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal?*

Or if they do in some sort believe it, is it credible that they do at all consider it seriously, and lay it to heart? So that if we have a mind to reconcile our belief with our actions, we must either alter our bible and our creed, or we must change our lives.

Let us then *consider, and shew ourselves men.* And if we do so, can any man to please himself for a little while be contented to be punished for ever ; and for the shadow of a short and imperfect happiness in this life, be willing to run the hazard of being really and eternally miserable in the next world?

Surely this consideration alone, of the extreme and endless misery of impenitent sinners in another world, if it were but well wrought into our minds, would be sufficient to kill all the temptations of this world, and to lay them dead at our feet ; and to make us deaf to all the enchantments of sin and vice : because they bid us infinitely to our loss, when they offer us the enjoyment of a short pleasure, upon so very hard and unequal condition as that of being miserable for ever.

The eternal rewards and punishments of another life, which are the great sanction and security of God's laws, one would think should be a sufficient weight to cast the scales against any pleasure, or any pain, that this world can tempt, or threaten us withal.

And yet, after all this, we will still go on to do wickedly; when *we know the terrors of the Lord*, and that we must one day answer all our bold violations of his law, and contempts of his authority, with the loss of our immortal souls, and by *suffering the vengeance of eternal fire?*

What is it then that can give men the heart and courage; but I recal that word, because it is not true courage but fool-hardiness, thus to out-brave the judgment of God, and to set at nought the horrible and amazing consideration of a miserable eternity? How is it possible that men that are awake, and in their wits, should have any ease in their minds, or enjoy so much as one quiet hour, whilst so great a danger hangs over their heads, and they have taken no tolerable care to prevent it? If we have any true and just sense of this danger, we cannot fail to shew that we have it, by making haste to escape it, and by taking that care of our souls, which is due to immortal spirits that are made to be happy or miserable to all eternity.

Let us not therefore estimate and measure things, as they appear now to our sensual and deluded and depraved judgments; but let us open our eyes, and look to the last issue and consequence of them: let us often think of these things, and consider well with ourselves, what apprehensions will then probably fill and possess our minds, when we shall stand trembling before our judge, in a fearful expectation of that terrible sentence which is just ready to be pronounced, and as soon as ever it is pronounced, to be executed upon us: when we shall have a full and clear sight of the unspeakable happiness, and of the horrible and astonishing miseries of another world: when there shall be no longer any veil of flesh and sense to interpose between them and us, and to hide these unequal things from our eyes: and, in a word, when heaven,

with

with all the glories of it, shall be open to our view ; and as the expression is in Job, *hell shall be naked before us and destruction shall have no covering.*

How shall we then be confounded, to find the truth and reality of those things which we will not now be persuaded to believe ? And how shall we then wish, that we had believed *the terrors of the LORD* ; and instead of quarrelling with the principles of religion, and calling them into question, we had lived under the constant sense and awe of them ?

Blessed be GOD, that there is yet hope concerning us and that we may yet *flee from the wrath to come* ; and that the miseries of eternity may yet be prevented in time and that for this very end and purpose, our most gracious and merciful GOD hath so clearly revealed these things to us, not with a desire to bring them upon us, but that we being warned by his threatnings, might not bring them upon ourselves.

I will conclude all with the counsel of the wise man *Seek not death in the error of your life, and pull not upon yourselves destruction with the works of your own hands. For GOD made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living : but ungodly men with their works and words have called it down upon themselves.* Wisdom of Solomon, ch. i. ver. 12, 13, 16. Which that none of us may do, GOD of his infinite goodness grant for his mercies sake in JESUS CHRIST : to whom with thee, O Father, and the holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, thanksgiving and praise both now and for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXVI.

success not always answerable to the
probability of second causes.

being a fast-sermon preached before the
House of Commons, on Wednesday,
April 16, 1690.

ECCLESIASTES ix. 11.

*returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not
to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread
to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor
yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth
to them all.*

NEXT to the acknowledgment of God's being,
nothing is more essential to religion, than the
belief of his providence, and a constant depend-
ance upon him, as the great governor of the
world, and the wise disposer of all the affairs and con-
cernments of the children of men: and nothing can be a
stronger argument of providence, than that there is such
an order of causes laid in nature, that in ordinary course
every thing does usually attain its end; and yet that
there is such a mixture of contingency, as that now and
then we cannot tell how nor why, the most likely
causes do deceive us, and fail of producing their usual
effects.

For if there be a God and a providence, it is reason-
able that things should be thus: because a providence does
dispose all things to have been at first wisely framed, and
with a fitness to attain their end; but yet it does also
dispose that God hath reserved to himself a power and
liberty

liberty to interpose, and to cross as he pleases, the usual course of things; to awaken men to the consideration of him, and a continual dependance upon him; and to teach us to ascribe those things to his wise disposal, which, if we never saw any change, we should be apt to impute to blind necessity. And therefore the wise-man, to bring us to an acknowledgment of the divine providence, tells us, that thus he had observed things to be in this world, that though they generally happen according to the probability of second causes, yet sometimes they fall out quite otherwise, *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, &c.*

The connexion of which words with the foregoing discourse, is briefly this. Among many other observations which the wise preacher makes in this sermon, of the vanity and uncertainty of all things in this world, and of the mistakes of men about them, he takes notice here in the text, and in the verse before it, of two extremes of human life: some, because of the uncertainty of worldly things, cast off all care and diligence, and neglect the use of proper and probable means, having found by experience, that when men have done all they can, they many times fail of their end, and are disappointed they know not how: others, on the contrary, rely so much upon their own skill and industry, as to promise success to themselves in all their undertakings; and presume so much upon second causes, as if no consideration at all were to be had of the first.

The wise preacher reproves both these extremes, and shews the folly and vanity of them. On the one hand of those who sit still, and will use no care and endeavour, because it may all happen to be disappointed, and to fail of success: not considering, that though prudent care and diligence will not always do the business, yet there is nothing to be done without them, in the ordinary course of things; and that, in the order of second causes, they are the most likely and effectual means to any end: and therefore, rejecting this lazy principle, he counsels men whatever they propose to themselves, to be very diligent and vigorous in the use of proper means for the attainment

ent of it, in the verse immediately before the text,
whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.
 But then he observes also, as great a folly and vanity
 the other hand; that they, who manage their affairs
 with great wisdom and industry, are apt to presume and
 reckon upon the certain success of them, without taking
 into consideration that which in all human affairs is most
 considerable, the favour and blessing of that almighty and
 wise providence which rules the world; *I returned*, says
 he, *and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift,*
nor the battle to the strong, &c.

I returned and saw; that is, having considered on the
 one hand the folly of sloth and carelessness, I turned mine
 eye the other way, and saw as great an error on the
 other hand; in men presuming too much upon their
 diligence and conduct, without taking notice of the
 providence of God. For I have found, says Solomon,
 manifold observations, that the success of things does
 not always answer the probability of second causes and
 means. So that the sum of the preacher's advice is this:
 when thou propoudest any end to thyself, be diligent
 and vigorous in the use of means; and when thou hast
 attained all, look above and beyond these to a superior cause
 which over-rules, and steers, and stops, as he pleases, all
 the motions and activity of second causes: and be not
 confident that all things are ever so wisely and firmly
 ordered, that they cannot fail of success. For the providence
 of God doth many times step in to divert the most pro-
 bable event of things, and to turn it quite another way:
 and whenever he pleaseth to do so, the most strong and
 able means do fall lame, or stumble, or by some accident
 altogether come short of their end.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that is, here below,
 in this inferior world.

That the race is not to the swift: this the Chaldee
 paraphrast does understand with relation to warlike affairs,
he beheld, says he, *and saw, that they who are as swift as*
angles do not always escape in the day of battle. But I
 would rather to understand the words in their more obvi-
 ous sense, that in a race many things may happen to
 hinder him that is swifter from winning it.

Nor

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Nor the battle to the strong, that is, victory and success in war do not always attend the greatest force and preparations, nor doth that side, which in human estimation is strongest, always prevail and get the better.

Nor yet bread to the wise; *neque doctorum panem* &c. so some render the words, that learned men are not always secured against poverty and want.

Nor yet riches to men of understanding; for so some interpreters translate the words, *neque industriis divitiis esse*, that those who take most pains do not always get the greatest estates.

Nor yet favour to men of skill; that is, to those who understand men and business, and how to apply themselves dextrously to the inclinations and interests of princes and great men. Others interpret these words more generally *neque peritorum artificum esse gratiam*, that those who excel most in their several arts and professions do not always meet with suitable encouragement: but because the word, which is here rendered favour, is so frequently used by Solomon for the favour of princes, the former sense seems to be more easy and natural.

But time and chance happeneth to them all; that is, saith Aben Ezra, there is a secret providence of God which sometimes presents men with unexpected opportunities, and interposeth accidents which no human wisdom could foresee; which gives success to very unlikely means and defeats the swift, and the strong, and the learned, and the industrious, and them that are best versed in men and business, of their several ends and designs.

It sometimes happens, that he that is swiftest, by falling, or by fainting, or by some other unlucky accident may lose the race.

It sometimes falls out, that a much smaller and weaker number, by the advantage of ground, or of a pass; by stratagem, or by a sudden surprise, or by some other accident and opportunity, may be victorious over a much greater force.

And that an unlearned man, in comparison, by favour of friends, or by some happy chance of setting out to the best advantage the little learning he has before one that

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hath less, may arrive at great things; when perhaps at the same time, the man that is a hundred times more learned than he, may be ready to starve.

And that men of no great parts and industry may stumble into an estate, and by some casual hit in trade may attain such a fortune, as the man that hath toiled and drudged all his life shall never be able to reach.

And lastly, that a man of no great ambition or design may fall into an opportunity, and by happening upon the *molliora tempora fandi*, some soft and lucky season of address, may slide into his prince's favour, and all on the sudden be hoisted up to that degree of dignity and esteem, as the designing man, who hath been laying trains to blow up his rivals, and waiting opportunities all his days to worm others out, and to skrew himself in, shall never be able to attain.

The words thus explained contain this general proposition, which shall be the subject of my following discourse,

That in human affairs the most likely means do not always attain their end, nor does the event constantly answer the probability of second causes; but there is a secret providence which governs and over-rules all things, and does, when it pleases, interpose to defeat the most hopeful and probable designs.

In the handling of this proposition I shall do these three things.

First, I shall confirm and illustrate the truth of it, by an induction of the particulars which are instanced in, here in the text.

Secondly, I shall give some reason and account of this, why the providence of God doth sometimes interpose to hinder and defeat the most probable designs.

Thirdly, I shall draw some inferences from the whole, suitable to the occasion of this day. In all which I shall endeavour to be as brief as conveniently I can.

First, for the confirmation and illustration of this proposition, that the most likely means do not always attain their end; but there is a secret providence which over-rules and governs all events, and does, when it

pleases, interpose to defeat the most probable and hopeful designs. This is the general conclusion which Solomon proves by this induction of particulars in the text. And he instanceth in the most probable means for the compassing of the several ends which most men in this world propose to themselves. And the great darlings of mankind are victory, riches, and honour: I do not mention pleasure, because that seems rather to result from the use and enjoyment of the other. Now if a man designs victory, what more probable means to overcome in a race than swiftness? What more likely to prevail in war than strength? If a man aim at riches, what more proper to raise an estate than understanding and industry? If a man aspire to honour, what more likely to prefer him to the king's favour and service than dexterity and skill in business? And yet experience shews that these means, as probable as they seem to be, are not always successful for the accomplishment of their several ends.

Or else we may suppose that Solomon by these instances did intend to represent the chief engines and instruments of human designs and actions. Now there are five things more especially, which do eminently qualify a man for any undertaking; expedition and quickness of dispatch; strength and force; providence and foresight; diligence and industry; knowledge, and insight into men and business: and some think that Solomon did intend to represent these several qualities by the several instances in the text. *The race is not to the swift*, that is, men of the greatest expedition and dispatch do not always succeed for we see that men do sometimes out-run business, and make haste to be undone. *Nor the battle to the strong*, that is, neither does force and strength always carry. *Nor yet bread to the wise*; which some understand of the provident care and pains of the husbandman, whose harvest is not always answerable to his labour and hope. *Nor yet riches to men of understanding*, or industry; that is, neither is diligence in business always crowned with success. *Nor yet favour to men of skill*, that is, neither have they that have the greatest dexterity in the management of affairs always the fortune to rise. And if

make the words in this sense, the thing will come much to one: but I rather approve the first interpretation, as being less forced and nearer to the letter.

So that the force of Solomon's reasoning is this. If the swiftest do not always win the race; nor the strongest always overcome in war: If knowledge and learning do not always secure men from want; nor industry always make men rich; nor political skill always raise men to high place; nor any other means that can be instanced as most probable, do constantly and infallibly succeed: then it must be acknowledged that there is some other cause which mingles itself with human affairs and governs all events; and which can, and does when it pleases, defeat the most likely, and bring to pass the most improbable designs: and what else can that be imagined to be, but the secret and over-ruling providence of almighty God? When we can find no other, we are very unreasonable if we will not admit this to be the cause of such extraordinary events, but will obstinately impute that to blind necessity or chance, which hath such plain characters upon it of a divine power and wisdom.

I might be large upon every one of these instances in the text, and illustrate them by pat and lively examples both out of scripture and other histories. But I shall briefly pass over all of them, but the second, *the battle is not the strong.*

The race is not to the swift. If we understand this generally, it is obvious to every man to imagine a great many accidents in a race, which may snatch victory from the swiftest runner. If we understand it, as the Chaldee paraphrase does, with relation to war, that the swiftest does not always overcome or escape in the day of battle; this Asahel is an eminent instance, who though he was, as the scripture tells us, *light of foot as a wild roe*, did he not escape the spear of Abner. It seems that among the ancients, swiftness was looked upon as a great qualification in a warrior, both because it serves for a sudden assault and onset, and likewise for that which in military we call a nimble retreat. And therefore David in poetical lamentation over those two great captains,

Saul and Jonathan, takes particular notice of this warlike quality of theirs; *they were*, says he, *swifter than eagles, stronger than lions*: and the constant character which Homer gives of Achilles, one of his principal heroes, is, that *he was swift of foot*: the poet feigns of him, that by some charm or gift of the gods he was invulnerable in all parts of his body except his heel; and that was the part to which he trusted; and in that he received his mortal wound: the wise poet hereby instructing us, that many times our greatest danger lies there, where we place our chief confidence and safety.

Nor yet bread to the wise, or to the learned. The poverty of poets is proverbial; and there are frequent instances in history of eminently learned persons that have been reduced to great straits and necessities.

Nor yet riches to men of understanding: by which, whether we understand men of great parts, or of great diligence and industry, it is obvious to every man's observation, that an ordinary capacity and understanding does usually lie more level to the business of a common trade and profession, than more refined and elevated parts, which lie rather for speculation than practice, and are better fitted for the pleasure and ornament of conversation, than for the toil and drudgery of business; as a fine razor is admirable for cutting hairs, but the dull hatchet much more proper for hewing a hard and knotty piece of timber. And even when parts and industry meet together, they are many times less successful in the raising of a great estate, than men of much lower and slower understandings: because these are apt to admire riches, which is a great spur to industry; and because they are perpetually intent upon one thing, and mind but one business, from which their thoughts never straggles into vain and useless enquiries after knowledge, or new or publick affairs; all which being foreign to their business they leave to those who are, as they are wont to say of them in scorn, more curious, and too wise to be rich.

Nor yet favour to men of skill. All history is full of instances of the casual advancement of men to great fa-

your and honour, when others, who have made it their serious study and business, have fallen short of it. I could give a famous example in this kind, of the manifold and manifest disappointment of a whole order of men: the sliest and most subtle, *in their generation, of all the children of this world*; the most politically instituted, and the best studied and skilled in the tempers and interests of men; the most pragmatikal, and cunning, to insinuate themselves into the intrigues of courts and great families: and who, by long experience, and an universal intelligence, and communicated observations, have reduced human affairs, at least as they think, to a certain art or method, and to the most steady rules that such contingent things are capable of: I believe you all guess before- and whom I mean, even the honest Jesuits: and yet these men, of so much art and skill, have met with as many checks and disappointments, as any sort of men ever did: they have been discountenanced by almost all princes and states, and, one time or other, banished out of most of the courts and countries of Europe. And it is no small argument of the divine providence, that so much cunning hath met with so little countenance and success; and hath been so often, so grossly infatuated, and their *counsels turned into foolishness*.

But I promised only to mention these, and to insist upon the second instance in the text, *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the battle is not to the strong, to the mighty, to the rich, the giants, for so the Hebrew word signifies*; which Solomon might possibly have respect to the history of the Israelites subduing the Canaanites, a people of great strength and stature, among whom were the giants, the sons of Anak: or more probably, to the famous encounter of his father David with the great Goliath: but however that be, the scripture is full of examples to this purpose; that when the providence of God pleased to interpose in favour of any side, it becomes glorious; according to the saying of king Asa in his prayer to God, *It is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with those that have no power*, 2 Chron. 14. 11.

Sometimes God hath defeated great armies by plain and apparent miracles: such was the drowning of Pharaoh and his host in the Red-sea; and the stars fighting in their courses against Siserá; by which poetical expression I suppose is meant Siserá's being remarkably defeated by a visible hand from heaven: and such was the destruction of the proud king of Assyria's army by an angel, who slew an hundred and fourscore and five thousand of them in one night.

Sometimes God does this by more human ways; by striking mighty armies with a panick and unaccountable fear; and sometimes by putting extraordinary spirits and courage into the weaker side, so that *an hundred shall chase a thousand, and a thousand shall put ten thousand to flight.*

This made David so frequently to acknowledge the providence of God, especially in the affairs of war. *There is no king saved by the multitude of an host, neither is a mighty man delivered by much strength.* Psal. xxxiii. 16. And again, *I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.* Psal. xlv. 6. And Solomon confirms the same observation, Prov. xxi. 30, 31. *There is no wisdom, says he, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord. The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but safety, or, as some translations render it, victory is of the Lord.* Gideon, by a very odd stratagem of lamps and pitchers, defeated a very numerous army, only with three hundred men. Jonathan and his armour-bearer, by the climbing up a rock, and coming suddenly on the back of the Philistines camp, struck them with such a terror, that they put their whole army to flight. King Asa, with a much inferior number, defeated that huge Ethiopian armament which consisted of a million. And how was Xerxes' mighty army overthrown, almost by a handful of Grecians? And, to come nearer ourselves, how was that formidable fleet of the Spaniards, which they presumptuously called invincible, shattered and broken in pieces chiefly by the winds and the sea? So many accidents there, especially in war, whereby the divine providence doth sometimes interpose and give victory to the weaker side.

And this hath been so apparent in all ages, that even the heathen did always acknowledge, in the affairs of war, a special interposition of fortune; by which the wiser among them did understand the divine providence. Plutarch, speaking of the Romans, says, that *time and fortune*, the very same with Solomon's time and chance here in the text, *did lay the foundation of their greatness*, by which he ascribes their success to a remarkable providence of God concurring with several happy opportunities.

And Livy, their great historian, hath this remarkable observation, that *in all human affairs, especially in matters of war, fortune hath a mighty stroke*. And again, *nowhere*, says he, *is the event less answerable to expectation than in war; and therefore nothing is so slight and inconsiderable, which may not turn the scales in a great matter*. And Cæsar himself, who was perhaps the most valiant and prosperous warrior that ever was, makes the same acknowledgment, *as in all other things*, says he, *particularly in war, fortune hath a huge sway*. And Plutarch observes, that there was no temple at Rome dedicated to wisdom or valour, but a most magnificent and lately one to fortune; signifying thereby, that they did ascribe their success infinitely more to the providence of God, than to their own courage and conduct. I proposed now, in the

Second place, to give some reason and account of this, why the providence of God doth sometimes thus interfere to hinder and defeat the most probable designs of men. To bring men to an acknowledgment of his providence, and of their dependance upon him, and subordination to him; and that he is the great governor of the world, and *rules in the kingdoms of men*; and that *all the inhabitants of the earth are as nothing to him*, and the power of second causes inconsiderable: that *he doth according to his will, in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none may stay his hand, or say unto him what dost thou*.

God hath so ordered things, in the administration of the affairs of the world, as to encourage the use of means; and

and yet so, as to keep men in a continual dependance upon him for the efficacy and success of them: to encourage industry and prudence, God generally permits things to their natural course, and to fall out according to the power and probability of second causes.

But then, lest men should cast off religion, and deny that God is above; lest they should trust in their sword and their bow, and say, the LORD hath not done this; lest men should look upon themselves as the creators and framers of their own fortune, and when they do but a little outstrip others in wisdom or power, in the skill and conduct of human affairs, they should grow proud and presumptuous, God is pleased sometimes more remarkably to interpose, to hide pride from man, as the expression is in Job; to check the haughtiness and insolence of mens spirits, and to keep them within the bounds of modesty and humility; to make us to know that we are but men, and that the reins of the world are not in our hands, but that there is one above who sways and governs all things here below.

And indeed if we should suppose, in the first frame of things, which we call nature, an immutable order to be fixed, and all things to go on in a constant course, according to the power and force of second causes, without any interposition of providence to stop, or alter the course, upon any occasion: In this case, the foundation of a great part of religion, but especially of prayer to God, would be quite taken away: upon this supposition it would be the vainest thing in the world to pray to God for the good success of our undertakings, or to acknowledge him as the author of it: for if God only look on, and permit all things to proceed in a settled and established course; then instead of praying to God we ought to ply the means, and to make the best provision and preparation we can for the effecting of what we desire; and to rely upon that, without taking God at all into our counsel and consideration. For all application to God by prayer doth evidently suppose, that the providence of God does frequently interpose, to over-rule events besides and beyond the natural and ordinary course

things, and to steer them to a quite different point, from that to which in human probability they seemed to end.

So that is every whit as necessary to religion to believe the providence of God, and that he governs the world, and does when he pleases interpose in the affairs of us as that he made it at first. I come now in the

Third and last place, to make some inferences suitable the occasion of this day, from what hath been said up- this argument: and they shall be these.

First, from hence we may learn, not to account religion, and time spent in the service of God, and in prayer him for his blessing upon our endeavours, to be any hindrance to our affairs. For after we have done all we can, the event is still in God's hand, and rests upon the disposal of his providence.

And did men firmly believe this, they would not neglect the duty of prayer, and behave themselves so care- lessly, and unconcernedly, and irreverently in it, as we see so many do; they would not look upon every hour that is spent in devotion as lost from their business.

If men would but take a view of what hath happened to them in the course of a long life, I believe most of us could see reason to acknowledge, that our prosperity and success in any kind hath depended more upon happy opportunities, upon undesigned and unexpected occurrences, than upon our own prudent forecast and con- sideration.

And if this were well considered by us, we should not think to be so apt to leave God out of our counsels and undertakings, as if he were a mere name and cypher in the world. It is, I am sure, the advice of one that was much wiser and more experienced, than any of us will pretend to be, I mean Solomon, Prov. iii. 5, 6. *Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths: be not wise in thine own eyes, fear the LORD and depart from evil.* There is no principle that ought more firmly to be believed by us than this, that we live under a constant sense and awe of almighty God,

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to depend upon his providence, and to seek his favour and blessing upon all our designs, being fearful to offend him and careful to please him, is a much nearer and surer way to success than our own best prudence and preparations.

And therefore at such a time, more especially, when we are going to war, or engaged in it, we should break off our sins by repentance and the sincere resolution of a better course: we should earnestly implore the blessing of God upon our undertakings; and not only take great care that our cause be just, but likewise that there be no wicked thing amongst us, to drive God out of our camp; no accursed thing, that may provoke him to deliver us into the hands of our enemies. It was a particular law given by God to the Jews, Deut. xxiii. 9. *When the host goeth forth against thine enemy, then keep thyself from every wicked thing*; then, that is, more especially at such a time.

And this is a necessary caution, not only to those who are personally engaged in the war, that by the favour of God they may have their heads covered in the day of battle, or if God shall suffer them to fall by the hand of the enemy, that having made their peace beforehand with him, they may not only have the comfort of a good cause but of a good conscience, void of offence towards God and men.

But this caution likewise concerns those, who are interested in the success and event of the war; as we are, not only in regard of our lives and estates, but of that which ought to be much dearer to us, our religion and the freedom of our consciences; which are now every whit as much at stake, as our civil interests and liberties. And therefore as we tender any, or all of these, we should be very careful to keep ourselves from every wicked thing; that they who fight for us, may not for our sins, and for our sakes, turn their backs in the day of battle, and fall by the sword of the enemy.

Secondly, from hence we may likewise learn, so to use the means as still to depend upon God; who can, he pleases, bless the counsels and endeavours of men,

blast them and make them of none effect. For as God hath promised nothing but to a wise and diligent use of means, so all our prudence, and industry, and most careful preparations may miscarry, if he do not favour our design: for without him nothing is wise, nothing is strong, nothing is able to reach and attain its end.

We should indeed use the means as vigorously, as if God did nothing; and when we have done so, we should depend upon God for the success of those means, as if we ourselves had done nothing; but did expect all from his favour and blessing: for when all is done, we are only safe under his protection, and sure of success from his blessing.

For whatever vain and foolish men may say in their hearts, there is, there is a God, that made the world, and administers the affairs of it with great wisdom and goodness; else how came any of us into being, or what do we here? Did we not most assuredly believe that there is a God, that governs the world and super-intends human affairs, the first wish of a wise man would be, to steal out of being, if he could; and that the same chance or necessity that brought him into the world, would take the first opportunity to carry him out. For to be every moment liable to present, and great, and certain evils, and to have no security against the continuance of them, or the return of the same or worse evils; nor to have any assurance of a better and more durable state of rest and happiness hereafter, is in truth so very melancholy a meditation, that I do not know any consideration in the world that is of force and power enough to support the mind of man under it: and were there not in the world a being, that is wiser, and better, and more powerful than ourselves, and that keeps things from running into endless confusion and disorder; a being that loves us, and takes care of us, and that will certainly consider and reward all the good that we do, and all the evil that we suffer upon our account, I do not see what reason any man could have to take any comfort and joy in being, or to wish the continuance of it for one moment.

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36 *Success not always answerable to Ser.*

Thirdly and lastly, the consideration of what hath been said upon this argument, should keep us from being too sanguine and confident of the most likely designs and undertakings; because these do not always answer the probability of second causes and means; and never less, than when we do with the greatest confidence rely upon them; when we promise most to ourselves from them, then are they most likely to deceive us: they are, as the prophet compares them, like a broken reed, which a man may walk with in his hand, whilst he lays no great stress upon it; but if he trust to it, and lean his whole weight on it, it will not only fail him, but even pierce him through.

And we cannot do a greater prejudice to our affairs when they are in the most hopeful and likely condition to succeed and do well, than to shut God and his providence out of our counsels and consideration. When we pass God by, and take no notice of him, but will rely upon our own wisdom and strength, we provoke him to leave us in the hands of our own counsel, and let us see what weak and foolish creatures we are: and a man is never in greater danger of drowning, than when he clasps his arms closest about himself: besides, that God loves to resist the self-confident and presumptuous, and to *scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts.*

And as in all our concerns we ought to have great regard to God, the supreme disposer of all things, and earnestly to seek his favour and blessing upon all our undertakings, so more especially in the affairs of war, which the providence of God is pleased many times in a very peculiar manner to interpose and interest itself: there is great reason to think he does so; because all wars as it were, an appeal to God, and a reference of the causes to the decision of his providence, which through the pride, and injustice, and perverse passions of men, receive no other determination.

And here God loves to shew himself, and in an apparent manner to take part with right and justice against those mighty oppressors of the earth, who like an overflowing flood would bear down all before them: in

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case, the providence of **GOD** is sometimes pleased to give a remarkable check to great power and violence; and to one that vainly gives out himself not unequal to the whole world, by very weak and contemptible means; and, as the apostle elegantly expresseth it, *by the things which are not, to bring to nought the things that are*: and so say to him, as **GOD** once did to the proud king of Assyria, Isa. xxxvii. 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32. *Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed, and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? When against the Holy One of Israel. Hast thou not heard long ago, that I have done it; and of ancient times that I have formed it? Now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities into ruinous heaps: therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were smayed and confounded, &c. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook into thy nose, and my bridle into thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.*—*The zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this.*

But more especially, in vindication of his oppressed truth and religion, and in the great and signal deliverances of his church and people, **GOD** is wont so take the conduct of affairs into his own hands, and not to proceed by human rules and measures: he then bids second causes stand by, that *his own arm may be seen, and his salvation may appear*: he raiseth the spirits of men above their natural pitch, and giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength, as the prophet expresseth it.

Thus hath the providence of **GOD** very visibly appeared in our late deliverance; in such a manner, as I know not whether he ever did for any other nation, except the people of Israel, when he delivered them from the house of bondage by so mighty a hand and so out-stretching an arm: and yet too many among us, I speak it this to our shame, do not seem to have the least sense of this great deliverance, or of the hand of **GOD** which is so visible in it; but like the children of Israel when

they were brought out of Egypt, we are all full of murmurings and discontent against GOD the author, and his servant the happy instrument under GOD of this our deliverance. What the prophet says of that people, may, I fear, be applied to us, Isa. xxvi. 10, 11. *Let favour be shewn to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD: LORD when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see, and be ashamed:* and I hope I may add that which follows in the next verse, LORD, *thou wilt ordain peace for us; for thou also hast wrought all our works for us.* What GOD hath already done for our deliverance is, I hope, an earnest that he will carry it on to a perfect peace and settlement; and this, notwithstanding our high provocations and horrible ingratitude to the GOD of our life, and of our salvation.

And whenever the providence of GOD thinks fit thus to interpose in human affairs, *the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong:* for which reason their majesties, in their great piety and wisdom, and from a just sense of the providence of almighty GOD, which rules the kingdoms of men, have thought fit to set apart this day for solemn repentance and humiliation: that the many and heinous sins, which we in this nation have been, and still are guilty of, and which are of all other our greatest and most dangerous enemies, may not separate between GOD and us, and hinder good things from us, and cover us with confusion in the day of our danger and distress; and likewise, earnestly to implore the favour and blessing of almighty GOD upon their majesties forces and preparations by sea and land: and more particularly, for the preservation of his majesty's sacred person, upon whom so much depends, and who is contented again to hazard himself to save us.

To conclude; there is no such way to engage the providence of GOD for us, as by real repentance and reformation; and by doing all we can, in our several places from the highest to the lowest, by the provision of wise and effectual laws for the discountenancing and suppressing

Ser. 36. *the probability of second causes.* 39

of prophaneness and vice, and by the careful and due execution of them, and by the more kindly and powerful influence of a good example, to retrieve the ancient piety and virtue of the nation; for without this, whatever we may think of the firmness of our present settlement, we cannot long be upon good terms with almighty God, upon whose favour depends the prosperity and stability of the present and future times.

I have but one thing more to mind you of; and that is, to stir up your charity towards the poor; which is likewise a great part of the duty of this day, and which ought always to accompany our prayers and fastings: *thy prayers and thine alms*, saith the angel to Cornelius, *are come up before God*: and therefore if we desire that our prayers should reach heaven, and receive a gracious answer from God, we must send up our alms along with them.

And instead of all other arguments to this purpose, I shall only recite to you the plain and persuasive words of God himself, in which he declares what kind of fast is acceptable to him, Isa. lviii. 5, 6, &c. *Is it such a fast as I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, and undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke: is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house; when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy salvation shall spring forth speedily; thy righteousness, or thine alms, shall go before thee, and the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward: then shalt thou call, and I will answer thee; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, I am.*

Now to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain: To God, even our Father, and to

40 *Success not always answerable, &c.* Ser. 36.

our LORE JESUS CHRIST, the first begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth: unto him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.

And the GOD of peace, that brought again from the dead our LORD JESUS, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight; through JESUS CHRIST, to whom be glory, for ever and ever Amen.



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The way to prevent the ruin of
a sinful people.

A

FAST-SERMON

Preached before the

LORD-MAYOR, &c.

ON

Wednesday, June the 18th, 1690.

To the right honourable
Sir THOMAS PILKINGTON,
Lord-Mayor of the City of London:

AND THE
Court of Aldermen.

MY LORD,

IN obedience to your commands,
I have published this sermon lately
preached before you, and do now humbly
present you with it; heartily wishing
may have that good effect for the reformation
of our lives, and reconciliation
of our unhappy differences, which was
sincerely intended by,

MY LORD,

Your most faithful

and humble servant,

JOHN TILLOTSON

S E R M O N XXXVII.

The way to prevent the ruin of a sinful people.

J E R E M I A H vi. 8.

Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.

THESE words are a merciful warning from God to the people of Israel by the prophet Jeremiah, the last prophet that God sent to them before their captivity in Babylon.

The time of his prophecy was of a long continuance, above the space of forty years, viz. from the thirteenth year of king Josiah, to the eleventh year of king Zedekiah, the year in which Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

This I observe, to shew the great patience of God to a sinful nation. And this is much the same space of time that God gave warning by our blessed SAVIOUR and his apostles to the same people of the Jews concerning their final destruction. For it was about forty years after the prediction of our SAVIOUR concerning it, just before his death, that the terrible destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation was executed upon them by the Romans, or rather chiefly by themselves: as I shall presently shew. Of which dreadful desolation, the first taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and their captivity into Babylon was a kind of type and forerunner. For as Josephus observes, the taking of Jerusalem by Titus Vespasian did happen in the very same month, and on the very same day of the month in which Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, viz. upon our tenth of August.

And it is not unworthy of our observation, that the time of God's warning is wont to hold some sort of proportion

portion with the extent of his judgments. Before the universal deluge which destroyed the whole world, Noah and his family only excepted, G o d gave a much longer warning by the preaching of Noah, for the space of an hundred and twenty years. Before the destruction of a particular nation, if we may judge by G o d's dealing with the Jews, his time of warning is forty years. And before the destruction of a particular city, if we may conclude any thing from the single example of Niniveh, the time of G o d's warning is yet much shorter, the space of forty days.

And now to what end doth G o d exercise so much patience and threaten so long beforehand, but that by the terror of his threatnings men may be brought to repentance, and by repentance may prevent the execution of them? For all the while that G o d by his prophet threatens ruin and destruction to the people of Israel, he earnestly invites and urges them to repentance, that by this means they might escape the ruin that was denounced against them, this being a condition perpetually implied in the denunciation of publick judgments, that if a people repent of the evil of their doings, G o d also will repent of the evil which he said he would do unto them, as he expressly declares chap. xviii. ver. 7, 8. *At what instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil which I thought to do unto them.* And here in the text, after G o d had threaten'd destruction to Jerusalem, because of the overflowing of all manner of wickedness and oppression in the midst of her, he gives her a merciful warning to prevent this ruin and desolation by repentance, ver. 6, 7. *Thus saith the LORD of Hosts, said, hew ye down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem; this is a city to be visited, she is wholly oppression in the midst of her. As a fountain casteth out waters, so she casteth out her wickedness. Before me continually is grief and wounds.* And yet when he had pronounced this fearful sentence upon her, he tells her that all this misery and desolation might yet be prevented, if they would but

hearken

hearken to the counsel of God, and be instructed by him concerning things of their peace: for so it follows in the next words, *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited. Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem,* that is, do but now at last take that counsel and warning, which hath so often and so long been tendered to thee by my servant the prophet, who hath now for the space of forty years continually, and that with great earnestness and importunity, been warning thee of this danger, and calling thee to repentance and a better mind.

Lest my soul depart from thee. In the Hebrew it is, *lest my soul be loosened and disjointed from thee*, as it is in the margin of your bibles; hereby signifying, in the most emphatical manner, the wonderful affection and kindness which God had for his people, and how strongly his soul was linked to them, and how loth he was to withdraw his love from them; it was like the tearing off of a limb, or the plucking of a joint in sunder; so unwilling is God to come to extremity; so hardly is he brought to resolve upon the ruin even of a sinful nation: how much rather would he, that they would be instructed and receive correction, and hearken to the things of their peace? But if they will not be persuaded, if no warning will work upon them, *his spirit will not always strive with them*; but *his soul will at last, though with great unwillingness and reluctance, depart from them.*

And then, no intercession will prevail for them; as he threatens by the same prophet, chap. xv. ver. 1. *Then will I hide the LORD unto me, though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people; cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth; away with them into captivity, for they have lost my heart, and no intercession of others for them, nothing but their own repentance can recover it.*

And when his soul is once departed from a people, and his heart turned against them, then all sorts of evils and calamities will be let loose upon them; as we may read in the next verse of that chapter; *And it shall come to pass if they say unto thee, whither shall we go forth?*
then

then shalt thou tell them, thus saith the LORD, such as are for death to death, and such as are for the sword to the sword, and such as are for the famine to the famine, and such as are for the captivity to the captivity, Jer. xv. For then God will be weary of repenting, as he tells them verse 6. *Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward; therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and deliver thee; I am weary of repenting.* By our obstinate impenitency we harden the heart of God against us, and make him weary of repenting. And when his soul is thus departed from a people, nothing remains but a fearful expectation of ruin. *Wo unto them, saith God by the prophet, when I depart from them. Therefore be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest thy soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.*

Having given this account of the words, I shall observe from them three things well worth our consideration.

First, the infinite goodness and patience of God towards a sinful people, and his great unwillingness to bring ruin and destruction upon them, *lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.* How loth is he that things should come to this extremity? It is not without great difficulty, and some kind of violence as it were, offered to himself, brought to this severe resolution; his soul is, as it were, rent and disjointed from them.

Secondly, you see here what is the only proper and effectual means to prevent the misery and ruin of a sinful people. If they will be instructed and take warning from the threatnings of God, and will become wiser and better, then his soul will not depart from them, he will not bring upon them the desolation which he hath threatened.

Thirdly, you have here intimated the miserable condition of a people, when God takes off his affection from them, and gives over all further care and concernment for them. *Wo unto them, when his soul parts from them.* For when God once leaves them, then all sorts of evils and calamities will break in upon them.

I shall speak as briefly as I can to these three observations from the text.

First, I observe the infinite patience and goodness of God towards a sinful people, and his great unwillingness to bring ruin and destruction upon them; *lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.* How loth is God that things should come to this? He is very patient to particular persons, notwithstanding their great and innumerable provocations. God is *strong and patient*, though men *provoke him every day*. And much greater is his patience to whole nations and to communities of men.

How great was it to the old world, when the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, for the space of an hundred and twenty years? And did not expire, till he saw that the wickedness of man was grown great upon the earth, and that all flesh had corrupted its way; till it was necessary to drown the world to cleanse it, to destroy mankind to reform it, by beginning a new world upon the only righteous family that was left of all the last generation of the old. For so God testifies concerning Noah, when he commanded him to enter into the ark, saying, *Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for that is, thee only, have I seen righteous before me in this generation.* Gen. vii. 1.

The patience of God was great likewise to Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them. For when the cry of their sins had reached heaven, and called loud for vengeance to be poured down upon them, to express the wonderful patience of God towards such grievous sinners, though nothing is hid from his sight and knowledge, yet he represented as coming down from heaven to earth on purpose to enquire into the truth of things, and whether they were altogether according to the cry that was come up to him. And when he found things as bad as was possible, yet he was he willing to have come almost to the lowest imaginable, that if there had been but ten righteous in those wicked cities, *he would not have destroyed them for the ten's sake.*

Nay,

Nay, he seems to come to lower terms yet, with the city of Jerusalem, *Jer. v. 1.* Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, and seeketh the truth, and will pardon it.

What can be imagined more slow, and mild, and merciful, than the proceedings of the divine justice against sinful people? **G O D** is represented in scripture as taking a long time to make ready his bow, and to whet his glittering sword, before his hand takes hold of vengeance; as if the instruments of his wrath lay by him blunt and rusty and unready for use. Many a time he threatens, and many a time lifts up his hand, before he gives the fatal blow. And how glad is he when any good man will step in and interpose to stay his hand? As we read *Psal. cxxiii.* Therefore he said, speaking to the people of Israel that he would destroy them, had not Moses his servant stood in the breach to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy them. And how kindly doth **G O D** take it of Phineas as a most acceptable piece of service done to him, for which he hardly knew how sufficiently to reward, though he was a means of putting a stop to his anger against the people of Israel: insomuch that the Psalmist tells us, that it was accounted to him for righteousness to all generations for evermore. I will recite the whole passage at large, because it is remarkable. When the people of Israel were seduced into idolatry and whoredom by the daughter of Moab, Phineas in great zeal stood up and executed judgment upon Zimri and Cozbi in the very act: which means the plague which was broken out upon the congregation of Israel was presently stayed. Hear what **G O D** says to Moses concerning this act of Phineas. **L O R D** spake unto Moses, saying, Phineas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned away my wrath from the children of Israel, whilst he was zealous for my sake, that I consumed them not. Wherefore say, hold I give unto him my covenant of peace, and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of

everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel. That which God takes so kindly at his hands, next to his zeal for him, is, that he pacified God's wrath towards the children of Israel.

And thus did God from time to time deal with the people of Israel, that great example of the old testament of the merciful methods of the divine providence towards a sinful nation. And an example, as St. Paul tells us, 1 Cor. x. 1. *purposely recorded for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

Let us therefore consider a little the astonishing patience of God towards that perverse people. After all the signs and wonders which he had wrought in their deliverance out of Egypt, and for their support in the wilderness; and notwithstanding their gross and stupid infidelity, and horrible ingratitude to God their saviour, and all their rebellious murmurings and discontents, yet he suffered their manners for the space of forty years.

And when they were at last peaceably settled in the promised land; notwithstanding their frequent relapses into idolatry, with what patience did God expect their repentance, and the result of all the merciful messages and warnings given them from time to time by his prophets, as one that earnestly desired it, and even longed for it? *O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved; how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?* Jer. iv. 14. that is, how long wilt thou delude thy self with vain hopes of escaping the judgments of God by any other way than by repentance? And again, Jer. xiii. 27. *O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?* And chap. viii. ver. 6. says God there, *I hearkened and I heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, what have I done?* Where God is represented, after the manner of men, waiting with great patience, as one that could have been glad to have heard any penitent word from them, to have seen any sign of their repentance and return to a better mind.

And when they made some shews of repentance, and had some fits of good resolution that did presently vanish and come to nothing, how passionately does G O D complain of their fickleness and inconstancy? *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.*

And at last, when nothing would do, with what difficulty and reluctance does G O D deliver them up into the hands of their enemies? Hosea xi. 8, 9. *How shall I give thee up Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee Judah? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zebobim? Mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together; I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not destroy Ephraim. What a conflict is here! What tenderness and yearning of his bowels towards them? He cannot find in his heart to give them up, till he is forced to it by the last necessity.*

And when the nation of the Jews, after their return from the captivity of Babylon, had in the course of several ages greatly corrupted themselves, and filled up to measure of their sins by crucifying the LORD of life and glory, yet how slow was the patience of GOD in bringing that fatal and final destruction upon them? not till after the most merciful warnings given to them, by the apostles of our LORD and SAVIOUR; not till after the most obstinate impenitency of forty years, under the most powerful means of repentance that any people in the world ever enjoyed. I proceed to the

II. Second observation from the text, namely, what is the only proper and effectual means to prevent the ruin of a sinful people? and that is, if they will be instructed and take warning by the threatnings of G O D to become wiser and better, then *his soul will not depart from them.* and he will not bring upon them the desolation threatened. *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, and I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited;* intimating, or rather plainly declaring to us, that if we receive instruction and take warning, the evil threatenings

shall not come. For what other reason can there be, why God should threaten so long before he strikes, and so earnestly press men to repentance, but that he might have the opportunity to spare them, and to shew mercy to them?

And indeed, as I observed before, all the denunciations and threatnings of God to a sinful nation do carry this tacit condition in them, that if that nation turn from their evil ways, God will repent of the evil which he thought to do unto them. For God never passeth so irrevocable a sentence upon a nation, as to exclude the case of repentance: nay on the contrary, he gives all imaginable encouragement to it, and is always ready to meet it, with a pardon in his hand. *How often would I have gathered thee,* says our merciful LORD when he wept over Jerusalem, *as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not; therefore your house is left unto you desolate.*

God is very merciful to particular persons upon their repentance. When the prodigal son in the parable, after his riot and lewdness came to himself and resolved to turn home, his father seeing him yet afar off coming towards him, came out to meet him, and had compassion on him and kissed him. And can any of us be so obstinate and hard-hearted, as not presently to resolve to repent and return, and to meet the compassions of such a father? Who, after we have offended him to the uttermost, is upon the first discovery of our repentance ready to be as kind to us, as he could possibly have been if we had never offended him.

And much more is God ready to receive a nation upon their sincere repentance; when his judgments must needs make great havock, and so many are like to suffer under them. This consideration God urgeth and pleads with the forward prophet, in behalf of the great city of Nineveh, Jonah iv. 11. *And shall not I spare that great city Nineveh, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons, if we cannot discern their right hand from their left? that so many innocent children, by which we may judge of the vast number of the rest of the inhabitants.* For this

is a great consideration with God, in his sending of public calamities, the multitude of the sufferers ; and that not only the guilty but the innocent also, without a special and miraculous providence, must be involved in a common calamity.

Sometimes God respites his judgments upon the mere external humiliation of a people, and some formal testimonies and expressions of their repentance. When the people of Israel sought God and enquired early after him, though they did but flatter him with their mouth, and their heart was not right with him, Psal. lxxviii. yet the psalmist tells us, that being full of compassion he forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not ; that is, he forgave them so far as to respite their ruin.

And much more will a sincere and effectual repentance stay God's hand, and infallibly turn him from the fierceness of his anger : insomuch that after he had fixed and determined the very day for the destruction of Nineveh and had engaged the credit of his prophet in it, yet as soon as he saw their works, and that they turned from their evil ways, and how glad was he to see it ? he presently repented of the evil which he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not. In this case God does not stand upon the reputation of his prophet, by whom he had sent so peremptory a message to them ; but his mercy breaks through all considerations, and rejoiceth against judgment for he cannot find in his heart to ruin those who by the terror of his judgments will be brought to repentance.

And this surely is a mighty motive and encouragement to repentance, to be assured that we shall find mercy and that when our ruin is even decreed, and all the instruments of God's wrath are fixed and ready for execution and his hand is just taking hold of vengeance, yet even then a sincere repentance will mitigate his hottest displeasure, and turn away his wrath. And if we will not come upon these terms, we extort the judgments of God from him, and force him to depart from us, and with violent hands we pull down vengeance upon our own heads.

III. Thirdly and lastly, the text intimates to us the miserable case and condition of a people when God takes

his heart and affection from them, when he gives over all further care and concernment for them, and abandons them to their own wickedness and folly, and to the miserable effects and consequences thereof: *Wo unto them, when his soul departs from them*: for then all sorts of evils and calamities will rush in, and *wrath will come upon them to the uttermost*; as was threatned to the Jews a little before their final destruction, and executed upon them in the most terrible and amazing manner that ever was from the foundation of the world. *These*, as our blessed SA-
VOUR expresses it, were *days of vengeance* indeed, that all things which were written, that is, foretold by Moses and the prophets concerning the fearful end of this per-verse and stiff-necked people, *might be fulfilled*.

And because my text speaks to Jerusalem, *be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited*; though this was spoken to Jerusalem before her captivity into Babylon, yet because this first captivity was a faint type of her last and final desolation by the Romans, when God's soul was indeed departed from her, and Judea was *left desolate, a land not inhabited*: I shall therefore briefly represent to you the full effect of this threatening in her final destruction, when God's soul was, as it were, perfectly loosened and disjointed from her: that you may see what the mercenefs and power of God's anger is, when *he departs from them, and wrath comes upon them to the uttermost*, because they would not be *instructed and know the time of their visitation*.

Thus it was with the Jews, about forty years after the passion of our LORD, whom *with wicked hands they had crucified and slain*: then was GOD's soul departed from them: then darkness and desolation came upon them; and they were in a far worse condition than a country could be that is forsaken of the sun, and left condemned to a perpetual night, in which darkness and disorder, confusion and fury do reign and rage; together with all the fatal consequences of zeal and strife, which, St. James tells us, are *confusion and every evil work*. For when GOD is once gone, all the good and happiness of man-

kind departs together with him: then men fall foul upon one another, divide into parties and factions, and execute the vengeance of G O D upon themselves with their own hands.

Thus it happened to the Jewish nation, when the measure of their iniquity was full, and their final ruin was approaching. And that we might know their fate and be instructed by it, G O D provided and preserved a faithful historian on purpose, who was an eye-witness of all that befel them; I mean Josephus, who was personally engaged, and was a considerable commander in the wars of the Jews with the Romans, before the siege of Jerusalem: and during the siege was present in the Roman camp, and being a Jew himself hath transmitted these things to posterity in a most exact and admirable history such a history, as no man that hath the heart and bowels of a man can read without the greatest pity and astonishment.

In the preface of that lamentable history he tells us *that all the misfortunes and calamities which the Jews suffered from the beginning of it had seen, compared with this last calamity of the Jewish nation, were but slight and inconsiderable.* He tells us likewise, that their civil dissensions were the next and immediate cause of their confusion and ruin.

And this more than once: for when Pompey, about sixty years before our SAVIOUR's birth, sat down before Jerusalem, he tells us, * that the factions and divisions which they had among themselves were the cause of the taking the city and temple at that time. And when they rebelled afterwards, that the heads of the factions provoked the Romans, and brought them willingly upon them, and at last forced the best natural prince in the world, Titus Vespasian, to that severity which he most earnestly desired by all means to have prevented. And he farther tells us, † that even before the siege of Jerusalem, the cities of Judea had all of them civil discords among themselves, and that in every one part of the Jews fought against another.

* Lib. i. c. 3.

† Lib. iv. c. 5.

And when Jerusalem began to be besieged, what a miserable condition was it in, by the cruelty of the zealots under the command of John the son of Giorah? And presently after another faction arose under Simon, who entered into the city with a fresh force, and assaulted the zealots in the temple; so that most miserable havock was made between them. † And then a third faction started up under Eleazar, as bad as either of the other: so that infinite almost were the numbers of the people within the city, that were barbarously slain by these seditions.

And what an infatuation was this? when the enemy was at the gates and ready to break in upon them, to employ their whole strength and force against one another: when the same courage and fury, which they spent so freely upon themselves, had it been turned with the like desperateness and obstinacy upon the Romans, might have endangered the whole force of the Roman empire. Once or twice indeed they seemed to lay aside their enmity for a little while, and to unite in the common defence; but as soon as the danger of a present assault was over, they relapsed into their former state of intestine enmity and dissension, as if that had been their main business, and the preservation of their city against the Romans only a work by the by, and not much to be regarded.

And to add to all their other miseries, they were so wounded by their own rage and madness, that they wilfully brought upon themselves an extreme famine. For, as the historian tells us, they themselves set on fire vast stores of corn and other necessities, sufficient to have served them for many years; and by this means the city was much sooner reduced, even by a famine of their own making, and which could not have been brought upon them but by themselves.

This famine, besides all the other miseries and cruelties which it occasioned within the city, did force great numbers of them to steal out by night into the Roman camp; where they met with as cruel but a speedier death. Titus, in hope to reduce them the sooner by terror,

ordered

† Lib. vii. c. 3.

ordered all those that came out of the city to be crucified before the walls. Which order was so severely executed, that for several days five hundred a day were crucified, till there was neither room left to place crosses in, nor wood whereof to make them: so that they who once cried out so vehemently against our SAVIOUR, *crucify him, crucify him*, had enough of it last, and by the just and most remarkable judgments of GOD were paid home in their own kind.

Behold the sad fate of a sinful people, when GOD departed from them! Then all evils overtake them at once. For as their misery increased, so did their impiety to that degree, that the historian tells us, § *they scorned and mocked at all divine and holy things, and derided the oracles of the prophets, esteeming them no better than fables*; and, in a word, were carried to that extremity of wickedness, as not only to prophane their temple in the highest matter, and to break the laws of their own religion, but even to violate the laws of nature and humanity in the grossest instances: which made the historian to give that dismal character of them, † *that as he thought no city ever suffered such things, so no nation from the beginning of the world, did ever so abound in a manner of wickedness and impiety*: a certain sign that GOD's soul was departed from them.

And the same historian afterwards, upon consideration of the lamentable state into which their seditions brought them, breaks out into this doleful lamentation over them, || *O miserable city! what didst thou suffer from the Romans, though at last they set thee on fire to purge thee from thy sins, that is to be compared with those miseries which thou hast brought upon thyself?*

To such a dismal state did things come at last, that as the same historian relates, many of the Jews proposed for the good success of their enemies, to deliver them from their civil dissensions, the calamity whereof was so great that their final destruction by the Romans did rather put an end to their misery than increase it,

—En! quo discordia cives
Perdixit miseros—

§ Lib. 5, c. 2, † Lib. vi, c. 11, || Lib. vii, c. 11.

To conclude this sad story. It was the Jews themselves that by their own folly and dissensions forced the Romans to this sorrowful victory over them; for in truth all the remorse and pity was on the enemies side. The Romans were little more than spectators in this cruel tragedy, the Jews acted it upon themselves: and they only, who were arrived at that prodigious height of impiety and wickedness, were fit to be the executioners of this vengeance of God upon one another: as if the prophet had foretold this, when he says, *thine own wickedness shall correct thee.* Jer. ii. 19.

When impiety and wickedness are at their highest pitch in a nation, then they themselves are the only proper instruments to punish one another. The Romans were by far too good and gentle to inflict a suffering upon the Jews, that was equal to the evil of their doings: none but their own barbarous selves, who were sunk down into the very lowest degeneracy of human nature, were capable of so much cruelty and inhumanity as was requisite to execute the judgment of God upon them to that degree which their sins had deserved.

You see, my brethren, by what hath been said upon this argument, what were the faults, and what the fate of the Jewish nation. Now these things, as the apostle expressly tells us, *were written for our admonition*, and to the intent that *we upon whom the ends of the world are* might be instructed by them: we, I say, who next the Jewish nation seem to be a people highly favoured of God above all the nations of the earth. We resemble them very much in their many and wonderful mercies, and a great deal too much in their faults and follies.

But as I intend it not, so God forbid that there should be any just ground for a full and exact parallel between them and us; yet this I must say, that nothing ever came nearer to them than we do in several respects. In our fickleness and inconstancy, in our murmurings and discontents; we are never pleased with what God does, neither when he brings us into danger, nor when he delivers us out of it: we resemble them likewise, in our horrible profane-

prophaneness and infidelity, and in our impiety and wickedness of several kinds : in our monstrous ingratitude and most unworthy returns to the **G O D** of our salvation : and lastly, in our factions and divisions, which were the fatal sign of **G O D**'s being departed from the Jews, and the immediate cause and means of those dismal calamities which wrought their final ruin. And how can we chuse but dread lest their fate should overtake us, the example of whose faults and follies we do in so many things so nearly resemble ?

That this may not, nor any thing like it, be our fate, let us apply ourselves to the great duties of this day : let us have a serious and deep repentance, and humiliation of ourselves before almighty **G O D** for the many and heinous sins which we in this nation have been, and still are guilty of, against his divine majesty ; by our profaneness and impiety, by our lewdness and luxury, by our oppression and injustice, by our implacable malice and hatred one towards another, and by our senseless divisions and animosities one against another, without cause and without end : by our neglect of **G O D**'s worship, and profanation of his holy day, and by our dreadful abuse of **G O D**'s great and glorious name in those horrid oaths and curses and imprecations which are heard almost day and night in the streets of this great city.

For these and all other our innumerable provocations of the patience and goodness and long-suffering of **G O D** towards us, let us sadly repent ourselves this day, and turn unto the **L O R D** with all our hearts, with fasting and with weeping, and with mourning : and rent our hearts and not our garments, and turn unto the **L O R D** our **G O D** ; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil : and knoweth if he will return and repent and leave a blessing behind him ? Turn thou us unto thee, O **L O R D**, and we shall be turned : take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously.

And let us earnestly beg of him, that he would be pleased to prevent those terrible judgments and calamities which hang over us, and which our sins have

deser-

deserved should fall upon us: and that he would perfect that wonderful deliverance which he hath begun for us, and *establish the thing which he hath wrought*: that he would bless them whom he hath set in authority over us; and particularly, that he would preserve the person of the king in his present expedition, and crown him with victory and good success.

And to our repentance and prayers let us add our liberal alms, and according to the counsel given by the prophet to Nebuchadnezzar, let us *break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, so be it may be a lengthening of our tranquillity.*

We are yet, blessed be **G O D**, in the full enjoyment of peace and quiet at home, and of our religion and civil liberties. **G O D** hath given us two excellent princes sitting on the throne together, and both of the same religion with the main body of the nation; and as bright examples of piety and goodness as England ever saw: and who do by all ways and means study and seek the good of the people committed to their charge.

So that if we did but **know** our own happiness, and how to value it, we might **be the** happiest people this way under heaven: and yet for all this, we are very far from being happy; because **we are neither** contented, nor satisfied; and though we have all the materials of happiness about us within our reach, yet have we not the skill of **G O D** and wisdom to put them together.

Miserable people! that may be happy and will not; that may have neither so fresh a deliverance from so great a danger as was just ready to have swallowed us up, nor the least apprehension of falling again into the like condition, can be a warning to us from returning again unto the same folly: for those odious and unhappy names of *heresy* and *schism* which some years ago sprang up among us, the **G O D** will knows how, did seem whilst a common danger threatened us, to be quite dead and buried: but no sooner was the danger over, but by a kind of miraculous infatuation, behold a sudden resurrection of them, with greater animosities, if possible, than before: just as it was with the Jews in the siege of Jerusalem, when the Romans

Romans had made a wide breach, and the city was furiously assaulted, the factions then gave truce to one another, and ran in to the common defence; but soon as ever the danger was a little over, they fell off afresh and prosecuted their main design of destroying one another.

And now that the danger is a little over with us also, how like a fate upon us does it look, that we are so soon altered from our wiser and better temper? Did we not stand and wisely before our late happy revolution, when we were united for our common defence against a common danger, and did let those unlucky names of distinction fall, so that they seemed to be quite extinguished? And can it now be wise to revive them, and to take them up again, when the same danger in some degree, and from the same implacable enemies, still hovers over us? No surely, it would not be wise, if the danger were quite past and over; but when it still remains and threatens us, what greater folly and infatuation can there be than still to divide and quarrel among ourselves? Will nothing but sad and bitter experience be an admonition to us? Will nothing but the last necessity and extremity of things bring us to ourselves and teach us wisdom?

It methinks we should all now be glad to be at rest, and free from the tedious troubles and distractions, the fruitless quarrels and divisions of fifty years. So long I remember; and all that space how very few years passed over us without some great calamity and dismal event. So that by this time one would think we should all be sick of our follies, and so tired with our unprofitable feuds and dissensions, as to make both sides look about them, to see if any body will take pity on us, and step in to part our quarrels.

And now I begin to be sensible, that I have engaged in a tender point indeed; and do feel myself standing upon a very slippery place. For who is fit to interpose in such hot and fierce differences? who can do it without danger, and with any hopes of success? And yet for the sake of *Jerusalem's sake* I will not hold my peace; for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep silence; Of so great consequence is it to the

and happiness of this church and nation, that these names and distinctions of parties should be laid down and abolished for ever.

In order whereunto I take it for granted, and lay it for principle, that he who hopes to persuade both sides must provoke neither: and therefore I will not so much as enquire where the fault lies. It is in these civil differences as in family quarrels between man and wife, if any man ask on which side lies the fault; one may almost safely answer at a venture, on both sides. It must indeed begin on one, but if it be not presently healed and made up, the other party is always so civil as to run in and take a share of the fault, that all the blame may not lie wholly on one side.

And now, my brethren, let me for once persuade and prevail with you for your good: let me be so happy as to say something that may sink into your hearts, and incline your minds to peace and good agreement with one another, *have salt in yourselves*, says our blessed SAVIOUR the great peace-maker, *and peace with one another*. By salt is meant grace and spiritual wisdom, and if that do but rule and sway in our hearts, we shall then endeavour, *if be possible, and as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men*. If we *have salt in ourselves*, that is, if we be wise, we will then certainly *have peace one with another*.

And if we were but once come to this healing temper, in this divided and distracted nation, we should not then need to fear *all the power of the enemy*. And this our enemies know full well: and therefore their chief policy and wisdom is, and ever hath been, to divide us; and it will be our own great folly and weakness if we suffer ourselves to be divided: for who that is wise will take counsel and advice from an enemy? But if we could agree and hold together, then our Jerusalem would be *a city that is compact together*, strong and impregnable.

Let us then be instructed, and know, *in this our day, the things which belong to peace, before they be hid from our eyes*. And let us all earnestly endeavour and pray for

the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love her says the Psalmist, Psal. cxxii. and they do not love her that do not seek her peace, and endeavour by all means to procure it: *that peace may be within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces:* The one cannot be without the other: without peace there can be no prosperity. And to go on with the words of the Psalmist, let every one of us say, yea let us all with one heart and voice say *for our brethren and companions sake, for the sake of our protestant brethren all the world over, let us say, peace be within thee: for the house of the Lord our God, for the sake of our holy religion, and of that excellent church whereof we all are, or ought to be members, let every one of us say, I will seek thy good.*

And what greater good can we do to the best religion how can we better serve the interest of it in all parts of the world, than by being at peace and unity amongst ourselves, here in England? upon whom the eyes of all the Protestants abroad are fixed, as the glory of the reformation, and the great bulwark and support of it.

That so under the providence of almighty God, and the conduct of two such excellent princes as he hath now blessed us withal: the one so brave and valiant, and both of them so wise, so good, so religious, we may at last arrive at a firm establishment, and become *like mount Zion that cannot be moved*; the perfection of beauty and strength, and the admiration and joy of the whole earth which God of his infinite goodness grant, for his mercies sake in JESUS CHRIST: to whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, thanksgiving and praise both now and ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXVIII.

A conscience void of offence towards
G O D and men.

Preached before the Queen at White-hall,
February 27, 1690-1.

A C T S xxiv. 6.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men.

THESE words are part of the defence which St. Paul made for himself, before Fælix the Roman governor.

In which he first of all vindicates himself from the charge of sedition, ver. 12. *they neither found me in a temple, disputing with any man; neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogue, nor in the city; that is, they could not charge him with making any disturbance either in church or state.*

After this, he makes a free and open profession of his religion, ver. 14. *But this I confess, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the G O D of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets:* here he declares the scriptures to be the rule of his faith, in opposition to the oral tradition of the Pharisees.

More particularly he asserts the doctrine of the resurrection, which was a principal article both of the Jewish and the Christian religion, ver. 15. *and I have hope also towards God, that there shall be a resurrection, both of the just and the unjust.*

And having made this declaration of his faith, he gives account of his life, in the words of the text, ver. 16.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men.

Herein, *ἐν τῷ*, that is, *in this work* do I employ myself; or as others render it, *in the mean time*, whilst I am in this world; or as others, I think most probably, *for this cause and reason*, *ἐν τῷ*, for *διὰ τῷ*, *for this reason*, because I believe a resurrection, therefore have I a conscientious care of my life, and all the actions of it.

The discourse I intend to make upon these words, shall be comprised in these following particulars.

I. Here is the extent of a good man's pious practice, *to have a conscience void of offence towards GOD, and towards men.*

II. Here is his constancy and perseverance in this course, *to have always a conscience void of offence.*

III. Here is his earnest care and endeavour to this purpose, *I exercise myself.*

IV. Here is the principal and immediate guide of his actions, which St. Paul here tells us was his conscience.

V. I shall lay down some rules and directions for the keeping of a good conscience.

VI. Here is the great motive and encouragement to this, which St. Paul tells us was the belief of a resurrection, and of a future state of rewards and punishment consequent upon it; *for this cause*; because *I hope for resurrection both of the just and unjust, I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence towards GOD, and towards men.* I shall speak but briefly to the first of these particulars, that I may be larger in the rest.

I. Here is the extent of a good man's pious practice. It hath regard to the whole compass of his duty, as it respects GOD and man. *I exercise myself*, says St. Paul, *to have a conscience void of offence towards GOD, and towards men.* And this distribution of our duty, under these two general heads, is very frequent in scripture. The decalogue refers our duty to these two heads: and accordingly our SAVIOUR comprehends the whole duty of man in these two great commandments, the love of GOD and of our neighbour, Matth. xxii.

Upon these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets, that is, all the moral precepts which are dispersed up and down in the law and the prophets, may be referred to these two general heads.

II. Here is his constancy and perseverance in this course. St. Paul says, that he exercised himself to have always a conscience void of offence; *διαπαντός*, continually, at all times, in the whole course and tenour of our lives and actions, without any balks and intermissions.

There are some that will refrain from grosser sins, and be very strict at some seasons; as during the time of a solemn repentance, and for some days before they receive the sacrament; and perhaps for a little while after it: and when these devout seasons are over they let themselves loose again to their former lewd and vicious course: but religion should be a constant frame and temper of mind, discovering itself in the habitual course of our lives and actions.

III. Here is likewise a very earnest care and endeavour to this purpose. Herein do I exercise myself, says St. Paul. The word *ἀσκήσας*, which is here rendered exercise, is a word of a very intense signification, and does denote that St. Paul applied himself to this business with all his strength and might, and that he made it his earnest study and endeavour: and so we must; we must take great care to understand our duty, and to be rightly informed concerning good and evil, that we may not mistake the nature of things, and call good evil, and evil good; we must apply our minds in good earnest to be thoroughly instructed in the parts of our duty, that so we may not be at a loss what to do when we are called to the practice of it: and when we know our duty, we must be true and honest to ourselves, and very careful and conscientious in the discharge and performance of it. I proceed in the

IVth place, to consider the principle and immediate end of our actions, which St. Paul here tells us, was conscience; *I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence*: by which he does not only mean a resolution to follow the dictate and direction of his conscience,

but likewise a due care to inform his conscience aright, that he might not in any thing transgress the law of God, and his duty.

Conscience is the great principle of moral actions, and our guide in matter of sin and duty. It is not the law and rule of our actions, that the law of God only is; but it is our immediate guide and director, telling us what is the law of God and our duty.

But because conscience is a word of a very large and various signification, I shall endeavour very briefly to give you the true notion of it. Now in common speech concerning conscience, every man is represented as having a kind of court and tribunal in his own breast, where he tries himself and all his actions: and conscience, under one notion or other, sustains all parts in this trial: the court is called the court of a man's conscience, and the bar at which the sinner stands impleaded, is called the bar of conscience: conscience is also the accuser; and is the record and register of our crimes, in which the memory of them is preserved: and it is the witness which gives testimony for or against us; hence are those expressions of *the testimony of our consciences*, and that *a man's own conscience is to him instead of a thousand witnesses*; and it is likewise the judge which declares the law, and what we ought, or ought not to have done, in such a case, and accordingly passeth sentence upon us by acquitting or condemning us. Thus, according to common use of speech, conscience sustains all imaginable parts in this spiritual court: it is the court, and the bench, and the bar; the accuser, and witness, and register, and all.

But I shall only at present consider conscience in the most common and famous notion of it, as it is a principle or faculty whereby we judge of moral good and evil, and do accordingly direct and govern our actions, so that in short, conscience is nothing else but *the judgment of a man's own mind concerning the morality of his actions*; that is, the good, or evil, or indifference of them; telling us what things are commanded by God, and consequently are our duty; what things are forbidden

by him, and consequently are sinful; what things are neither commanded nor forbidden, and consequently are indifferent. I proceed in the

Vth place, to give some rules and directions for the keeping of a conscience void of offence. And they shall be these following :

First, never in any case to act contrary to the persuasion and conviction of our conscience. For that certainly is a great sin, and that which properly offends the conscience and renders us guilty; guilt being nothing else but trouble arising in our minds from a consciousness of having done contrary to what we are verily persuaded was our duty: and though perhaps this persuasion is not always well grounded, yet the guilt is the same so long as this persuasion continues; because every man's conscience is a kind of god to him, and accuseth or absolves him according to the present persuasion of it. And therefore we ought to take great care not to offend against the light and conviction of our own mind.

Secondly, we should be very careful to inform our consciences aright, that we may not mistake concerning our duty; or if we do, that our error and mistake may not be grossly wilful and faulty.

And this rule is the more necessary to be considered and regarded by us, because generally men are apt to think a sufficient excuse for any thing, that they did it according to their conscience. But this will appear to be a dangerous mistake, and of very pernicious consequence to the souls of men, if we consider these two things.

First, That men may be guilty of the most heinous sins following an erroneous conscience.

Secondly, And these sins may prove damnable without a particular repentance for them.

First, That men may be guilty of the most heinous sins following an erroneous conscience. Men may neglect and abuse themselves so far, as to do some of the worst and wickedest things in the world with a persuasion that they do well. Our SAVIOUR tells his disciples that *they should come when the Jews should put them to death, thinking they did GOD good service*, John xvi, 2. nay the Jews

Jews murdered the SON of GOD himself through ignorance and a false persuasion of mind: *Father, forgive them*, says our blessed LORD, when he was breathing out his soul upon the cross, *for they know not what they do*. Luke xxiii. 34. And St. Peter, after he had charged the Jews *with killing the prince of life*, he presently adds, *I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers*. Acts iii. 17. And St. Paul, in mitigation of that great crime, says, *had they known, they would not have crucified the LORD of life and glory*: and concerning himself he tells us, *that he verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things against the name of JESUS of Nazareth*: and yet notwithstanding that he acted herein according to the persuasion of his conscience, he tells us that he had been a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious, and a murderer, and in a word, the greatest of sinners. So that men may be guilty of the greatest sins in following an erroneous conscience. And,

2dly, These sins may prove damnable, without a particular repentance for them. Where the ignorance and mistake is not grossly wilful, there GOD will accept of a general repentance; but where it is grossly wilful, great sins committed upon it are not pardoned without a particular repentance for them: and an error which proceeds from want of ordinary human care and due government of a man's self, is in a great degree wilful: and when it proceeds from an unreasonable and obstinate prejudice, from great pride and self-conceit, and contempt of council and instruction; or from a visible bias of self-interest, or when it is accompanied with a furious passion and zeal, prompting men to cruel and horrible things contrary to the light of nature and the common sense of humanity: an error proceeding from such causes, and producing such effects, is wilful in so high a degree, that whatever evil is done in virtue of it is almost equally faulty with a direct and wilful violation of the law of GOD.

The ignorance and mistake doth indeed make the person so mistaken more capable of forgiveness, which is the ground of our SAVIOUR's prayer for his murderers.

Father

father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. St. Paul likewise tells us, that he found mercy upon this account, nevertheless, says he, *I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, and in unbelief*, that is, through a false persuasion of mind, not believing it to be a sin: and yet he did not obtain this mercy, without a particular conviction of his fault and repentance for it. And St. Peter after he had convinced the Jews of their great sin in crucifying CHRIST, though they did it ignorantly, yet he exhorts them to a particular and deep repentance for it, as necessary to the pardon and forgiveness of it: and therefore after he had said, *I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers*, Acts iii. 19. he immediately adds, *repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.*

So that it highly concerns men to consider what opinions they embrace in order to practise, and not to suffer themselves to be hurried away by an unreasonable prejudice and a heady passion, without a due and calm examination of things, nor to be over-born by pride, or humour, or partiality, or interest, or by a furious and extravagant zeal: because proportionable to the voluntariness of our error will be the guilt of our practice consequent to that error. Indeed where our error is involuntary, and morally invincible, God will consider it, and make allowance for it; but where it is voluntary, and occasioned by our own gross faults and neglect, we are bound to consider, and rectify our mistake: for whatever we do contrary to the law of God and our duty, through the virtue of that false persuasion, we do it at our utmost peril, and must be answerable to God for it, notwithstanding we did it according to the dictate of our conscience.

A third rule is this, that in all doubts of conscience we endeavour to be equal and impartial, and do not lay all the weight of our doubts on one side, when there is perhaps as much or greater reason of doubting on the other: and consequently, that we be as tractable and ready to receive satisfaction of our doubts in one kind as in another, and be equally contented to have them over-ruled

ruled in cases that are equal: I mean, where our passions and interests are not concerned, as well as where they are. And if we do not do this, it is a sign that we are partial in our pretences of conscience, and that we do not aim merely at the peace and satisfaction of our own minds, but have some other interest and design.

For it is a very suspicious thing, when mens doubts and scruples bear all on one side, especially if it be on that side which is against charity, and peace, and obedience to government, whether ecclesiastical or civil: in this case I think that a mere doubt, and much more a scruple, may, nay, ought in reason to be over-ruled by the command of authority, by the opinion and judgment of wise and good men, and in consideration of the public peace, and of the unity and edification of the church.

Not that a man is in any case to go against the clear persuasion and conviction of his own mind, but where there is only a meer doubt concerning the lawfulness and unlawfulness of a thing, it seems to me in that case very reasonable that a man should suffer a mere doubt or scruple to be over-ruled by any of those weighty considerations which I mentioned before.

The fourth rule is, that all pretences of conscience are vehemently to be suspected, which are accompanied with turbulent passion and a furious zeal. It is a hundred to one but such a man's conscience is in the wrong. It is an excellent saying of St. James, *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*. Jam. i. 20. that is, the fierce passions of men are no proper instruments to promote religion, and to accomplish any thing that is good. And therefore if any man be transported with a wild zeal, and pretend conscience for his fury, it is greatly to be suspected, but he is in an error: none are so likely to judge amiss, as they whose minds are clouded and blinded by their passions,

*Nubila mens est,
Hæc ubi regnant.*

Boet

io,
and

A

And if men would carefully observe themselves, they might almost certainly know when they act upon reason and a true principle of conscience. A good conscience is easy to itself, and pleased with its own doings; but when a man's passion and discontent are a weight upon his judgment, and do, as it were, bear down his conscience to a compliance, no wonder if this puts a man's mind to a very unnatural and uneasy state.

There can hardly be a broader sign that a man is in the wrong, than to rage and be confident: because this mainly shews that the man's conscience is not settled upon reason, but that he hath brought over his conscience to his interest, or to his humour and discontent.

And though such a man may be so far blinded by his passion as not to see what is right, yet methinks he should feel himself to be in the wrong by his being so very hot and impatient.

Art thou sure thou art in the right? thou art a happy man, and hast reason to be pleased: What cause then, what need is there of being angry? Hath a man reason on his side? what would he have more? Why then does he fly out into passion? which as it gives no strength to a bad argument, so I could never yet see that it was any grace and advantage to a good one.

Of the great evil, and the perpetual mistake of this furious kind of zeal, the Jews are a lively and a lamentable example, in their carriage towards our blessed SAVIOUR and his apostles; and more particularly St. Paul, when he persecuted the Christians from a false and erroneous persuasion of his conscience. Hear how St. Paul describes himself and his own doings whilst he was acted with an erroneous conscience: *I persecuted, says he, this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prison men and women.* Acts xxii. 4. and in another chapter, *heavily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things against the name of JESUS of Nazareth.* Acts ix. 9. here was his erroneous conscience. Let us next enquire what were the unhappy concomitants and effects of it;

10, 11. *which things, says he, I also did in Jerusalem and many of the saints I shut up in prison, and when*

they

they were put to death, I gave my voice against them, and punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, persecuted them even to strange cities. When conscience transports men with such a furious zeal and passion, it is hardly ever in the right; or if it should happen to be so, they who are thus transported, by their ungracious way of maintaining the truth, and their ill management of a good cause, have found out a cunning way to be in the wrong, even when they are in the right.

Fifthly, all pretences of conscience are likewise to be suspected, which are not accompanied with modesty and humility, and a teachable temper and disposition, willing to learn and to be better informed. A proud and conceited temper of mind is very likely to run into mistakes; because pride and fulness of a man's self do keep out knowledge, and obstructs all the passages by which wisdom and instruction should enter into men. besides that it provokes God to abandon men to their own follies and mistakes; for God *reproves the proud* but *the meek will be guide in judgment*, and *will give more grace and wisdom to the humble*. When men once come to this, to think themselves wiser than their teachers, and to despise and cast off their guides, wonder if then they go astray.

Lastly, let us be sure to mind that which is our plain and unquestionable duty: the great things of religion, wherein the life and substance of it doth consist; and the things likewise which make for peace, and whereby we may edify one another: and let us not suffer our disputes about lesser matters to prejudice and hinder our main duty: but let it be our great care not to fail in those greater things which are comprehended under the two great commandments of the law, the love of God and of our neighbour: let us be strict and constant in piety and devotion towards God; chaste and temperate in reference to ourselves; just and honest, kind and charitable, humble and meek, patient and peaceable towards all men; submissive and obedient to our superiors, natural, civil, and spiritual. A due regard

These great virtues of the christian life is the way to
 keep a conscience void of offence towards GOD, and towards
 men: and surely the best means to have our doubts cleared
 about matters of lesser moment in religion, is heartily to
 set about the practice of the great and unquestionable
 duties of it: so our blessed SAVIOUR hath assured us,
 that if any man will do the will of GOD, he shall know
 of his doctrine whether it be of GOD. John vii. 17. I
 come now in the

Vith and last place, to consider the great motive
 and encouragement to this conscientious care of our lives
 and actions; which St. Paul here tells us was his belief
 of a resurrection, and of the rewards and punishments
 consequent upon it; *I have hope*, says he, *towards GOD,*
that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust:
 for this cause therefore, *I exercise myself to have always*
conscience void of offence toward GOD, and toward
men.

If we believe the resurrection of the dead, and a future
 judgment, we ought to be very careful to discharge a
 good conscience now, in order to the rendring of a good
 account hereafter; that *we may be sincere and without*
hypocrisy, with respect to the day of CHRIST, as the apostle
 presseth it. For when that great day of recompences
 shall come, we shall most assuredly find that nothing will
 so much raise our hearts, and make us to lift up our heads with
 religion, like the witness of a good conscience: and therefore
 we should make that our constant care and companion
 which will then be our great comfort and rejoicing,
 a good conscience and the testimony of it, *that in all*
simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation
to the world.

And on the contrary, when we come to appear before
 the great judge of the world, nothing will fill our minds
 with so much terror, and our faces with so much confu-
 sion, as the clamorous accusations of a guilty conscience;
 which will be *more than a thousand witnesses* against us,
 which will anticipate our condemnation, and pass almost as
 our sentence upon us as the judge himself can.

This is that which will make the sinner to droop, and to hang down his head for ever : and one of the principal ingredients of his misery and torment will be the perpetual regret and remorse of his own mind for his wilful wickedness and folly ; which will kindle a fire within him as hot as that without him, and as hard to be quenched.

This consideration ought to have a mighty operation upon us to make us very careful to have consciences void of offence now, that they may be free from torment and anguish hereafter : that when we shall come into the other world, we may not be eternally displeased with ourselves, and enraged at our own doings ; but may carry with us thither consciences clear of all guilt, either by innocence, or by repentance.

The firm belief of a future state of eternal happiness or misery in another world is the great weight or spring that sets a going those two powerful principles of human activity, the hopes and the fears of men ; and is in its nature so fitted to raise these passions to that degree, that did not experience shew us the contrary, one would think it morally impossible for human nature to resist the mighty force of it.

All men are sensible, more or less, at one time or other of the true force of these arguments ; but the mischief is, that in some persons they work quite the wrong way and instead of leading men to repentance, they drive them to infidelity : they cannot deny the force of these arguments, if they were true ; but that they may avoid the force of them, they will not believe them to be true and so far they are in the right, that granting these things to be true, they cannot but acknowledge that they ought to live otherwise than they do : but here is their fatal miscarriage, that being resolved upon an evil course, first they cannot reconcile their practice with such principles as these, they will fit their principles to their practice and so they will believe nothing at all of the rewards and punishments of another world, lest this should disturb them in their course : vain men ! as if heaven and hell must needs vanish and disappear, because some witty wicked men have no mind to believe them,

These men are infidels in their own defence, and merely for the quiet of their own minds; that their consciences may not perpetually rate them, and fly in their faces. For a right belief and an evil conscience are but unsuitable companions; they are quarrellous neighbours, and must needs live very uneasily by one another. He that believes the principles of religion, and yet is conscious to himself that he hath lived contrary to them, and still continues to do so, how can he possibly have any peace and quiet in his mind? unless like Jonah he can sleep in a storm, and his conscience be, as it were, *seared with a hot iron*: for if his conscience be awake, and in any degree sensible, the evident danger of eternal ruin, continually hanging over him, must in reason either drive him to repentance or to despair: if so forcible and violent an argument can make no impression upon us, we are stupid and bewitched, we are lost and undone, we are wretched and miserable for ever.

But besides the future reward of a holy and conscientious course, which is *unspeakable and full of glory*; it hath also this present fruit, this earnest, as I may say, and ready money in hand, the peace and satisfaction of our own minds, which is much more valuable *than thousands of gold and silver*; the unspeakable comfort where every man will then find, when he hath most need of it: for it will be matter of great joy to him, not only under the sorest afflictions and calamities of life, even at the hour of death; when the miseries of oppression oppress him, and the sorrows of death compass him about, and the pangs of it are ready to take hold of him.

There is certainly no such comfort under the evils and afflictions of this life, as a faithful witness in our breasts of our own innocency and integrity: when we are afflicted by God, or persecuted and reviled by men, it cannot be a mighty consolation to us, to be conscious to ourselves of our own sincerity. For though no man can merit and justify himself before GOD, as to the perfect innocency of his life, in which sense St. Paul says, 1 Cor. 4. *that though he knew nothing by himself, yet was*

be not thereby justified; I say, though no man can plead perfect innocency, ye as to the general course and tenour of an unblameable life, a good man may appeal to God, and even when he afflicts him, may look upon him as a tender and compassionate father, and not as an angry and revengeful judge.

With this, holy and patient Job, under all those terrible disasters and calamities which befel him, was able in some measure to comfort himself: after he had lost all, and he had a great deal to lose; when he was forsaken of all other comfort, even the charitable opinion of his best friends concerning his sincerity. In these sad and disconsolate circumstances, what was it that bore up his spirit? nothing but the conscience of his own integrity. See with what resolution and constancy of mind he asserts and maintains it: *I will not, says he, remove mine integrity from me: my righteousness will I hold fast, and will not let it go: mine heart shall not reproach me, so long as I live.* Job xxv. 5, 6. You see, that when every thing else was gone, his integrity stuck by him, and supported him to the last.

And as to persecutions and sufferings from men, our own innocency, and the goodness of our cause, will be our best comfort under them: when we are not guilty to ourselves that we have deserved them from men, and are inwardly assured that whatever we patiently suffer for God and a good conscience, will all turn to our account another day, and *work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

This was that which supported the first Christians, that noble army of martyrs, under all those bitter and cruel persecutions, which had otherwise been beyond human patience to have endured: this comforted them in all their tribulations; *our rejoicing, says St. Paul, is this, the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.*

So likewise under that inferior but equally malicious sort of persecution, of which this age is so very profuse and prodigal, I mean the causeless calumnies and

reaches of men; if under these we can but approve our consciences to GOD, the uncharitable censures of men are not so much to be regarded by us: some impression they will make upon a tender mind, but we must not, if we can help it, let them sink too deep into our spirits: *if our hearts condemn us not, we may have confidence towards GOD*, 1 John iii. 21. and then surely much more towards men: if GOD and our own consciences do but acquit us, methinks it should be no such difficult matter to bear the slanders and hard censures of men.

But above all other times, the comfort of a good conscience is most sensible, and most considerable at the hour of death: for as nothing dejects a man's spirits more, and sends him down with so much sorrow to the grave, as the guilt of an evil conscience; what terror and anguish, what rage and despair do seize upon a sinner at that time, when he reflects upon what he hath done, and considers what he is like to suffer? So on the other hand, where is nothing that revives and raises the fainting spirits of a dying man, like the conscience of a holy and useful man, which hath brought glory to GOD, and good to men. *The wicked*, says Solomon, Prov. xiv. 32. *is driven away in his wickedness*, that is, he is carried out of the world, as it were, in a storm and tempest, *but the righteous bath hope in his death*; he usually dies calmly and comfortably: *Mark the perfect man*, says David, Psal. xvii. 37. *and behold the upright; for the end of that exceeding is peace.*

If a man be conscious to himself that he hath sincerely endeavoured to keep the commandments of GOD, to do the things which please him: if he hath lived sensibly, and as St. Paul saith of himself, Acts xxiii. *in all good conscience before GOD and men*; what an inexpressible consolation must it be to him, in that dark gloomy time, and when he is *walking through the valley of the shadow of death*, then to fear no evil? and how able with our blessed SAVIOUR to say, though in a much inferior measure and degree, John xvii. 4. *Father, I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do: and to be able to look*

death.

^d death in the face with the like courage and constancy of mind as St. Paul did when he saw it approaching towards him: *I am now*, says he, 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8. *ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the LORD the righteous judge shall give me at that day.* A comfortable death, that is free from the stings and upbraidings, the terrors and tortures, the confusion and amazement of a guilty conscience, is a happiness so desirable, as to be well worth the best care and endeavour of a man's whole life.

Let us then have a conscientious regard to the whole compass of our duty, and, with St. Paul, *let us exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence towards GOD, and towards men*: and let us never do any thing whereby we shall offer violence to the light of our minds. GOD hath given us this principle to be our constant guide and companion; and whoever, after due care to inform himself aright, does sincerely follow the dictate and direction of this guide, shall never fatally miscarry: but whoever goes against the clear dictate and conviction of his conscience, in so doing he undermines the foundation of his own comfort and peace, and sins against GOD and his own soul.

And to the end we may keep our consciences clear of guilt, we should frequently examine ourselves, and look back upon the actions of our lives, and call ourselves to a strict account for them; that whereinsoever we have failed of innocency, we may make it up by repentance, and may get our consciences cleared of guilt by pardon and forgiveness: and if we do not do this, we cannot with confidence rely upon the testimony of our consciences; because many great sins may slip out of our memories without a particular repentance for them, which yet do require and stand in need of a particular repentance.

Especially, we should search our consciences more narrowly at these more solemn times of repentance, when we are preparing ourselves to receive the holy Sacrament

cerament: and if at these times our hearts do accuse and condemn us for any thing, we should not only heartily lament and bewail it before GOD, but sincerely resolve by GOD's grace to reform in that particular, and from that time to break off that sin which we have then repented of, and have asked forgiveness of GOD for: for after we have repented of it, we return to it again, we wound our consciences afresh, and involve them in a new guilt.

In the last place, we should reverence our consciences, and stand in awe of them, and have a great regard to their testimony and verdict: for conscience is a domestick judge, and a kind of familiar GOD: and therefore, next to the supreme majesty of heaven and earth, every man should be afraid to offend his own reason and conscience, which, whenever we knowingly do amiss, will beat us with many stripes, and handle us more severely than the greatest enemy we have in the world: so that next to the dreadful sentence of the great day, every man hath reason to dread the sentence of his own conscience. GOD is *greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things*; and under him we have the greatest reason to fear the judgment of our own consciences: for nothing but that can give us comfort, and nothing can create so much trouble and disquiet to us.

And though the judgment of our consciences be not always the judgment of GOD, yet we have great reason to have great regard to it; and that upon several accounts, which I shall but briefly mention, and so content myself.

First, because the judgment of our conscience is free from any compulsion. No body can force it from us, whether we will or no; and make us to pass sentence against ourselves, whether we see reason for it or no, which

secondly, the sentence of our own consciences is very likely to be impartial, at least not too hard on the severe; because men naturally love themselves, and are too ready to be favourable in their own case. All the world cannot

cerament

cannot bribe a man against himself: there is no man whose mind is not either disordered by melancholy, or deluded by false principles, that is apt to be credulous against himself, and his own interest and peace.

Thirdly, the judgment which our conscience passeth upon our own actions, is upon the most intimate and certain knowledge of them, and of their true motives and ends. We may easily be deceived in our judgment of the actions of other men, and may think them to be much better or worse than in truth they are: because we cannot certainly tell with what mind they were done, and what circumstances there may be to excuse or aggravate them; how strong the temptation was, or how weak the judgment of him that was seduced by it into error and folly.

But we are conscious to all the secret springs, and motives, and circumstances of our own actions: we can descend into our own hearts, and dive to the bottom of them, and search into the most retired corners of our intentions and ends; which none, besides ourselves, but only God can do; for excepting him only, *none know the things of a man but the spirit of a man which is in him.*

Fourthly, the sentence of our conscience is peremptory and inexorable, and there is no way to avoid it. Thou mayest possibly fly from the wrath of other men to the uttermost parts of the earth, but thou canst not stir one step from thyself: in vain shalt thou call upon the mountains and rocks to fall on thee, and hide thee from the sight of thine own conscience.

Wretched and miserable man! when thou hast offended and wounded thy conscience: for whither canst thou go to escape the eye of this witness, the terror of this judge, the torment of this executioner? A man may as soon get rid of himself, and quit his own being, as fly from the sharp accusations and stinging guilt of his own conscience, which will perpetually haunt him, till it be done away by repentance and forgiveness.

We account it a fearful thing to be haunted by evil spirits, and yet the spirit of a man which is in him, thoroughly affrighted with its own guilt, may be a more hastily and amazing spectacle than all the devils in hell: there is no such frightful apparition in the world, as a man's own guilty and terrified conscience staring him in the face: a *spirit* that is thus wounded, *who can bear?*

To conclude; let these considerations prevail with us always to live, not with regard to the opinion of others, which may be grounded upon mistake, or may not indeed be their opinion, but their flattery; but with regard to the judgment of our own conscience, which though it may sometimes be mistaken, can never be bribed and corrupted: we may be hypocrites to others and base flatterers, but our own consciences whenever they are thoroughly awakened are always sincere, and deal truly with us, and speak to us as they think.

Therefore whatever we say or do, let it be sincere: though hypocrisy may for a while preserve our esteem and reputation with others, yet it can signify nothing to the peace of our own minds: and then what will it avail us to conceal any thing from other men, when we can hide nothing that we say or do from our own consciences?

The sum of all is this: if we would keep a conscience void of offence, let us always be calm and considerate, and have the patience to examine things thoroughly and impartially: let us be humble and willing to learn, and never too proud and stiff to be better informed: let us do what we can to free ourselves from prejudice and passion, from self-conceit and self-interest, which are often too strong a bias upon the judgments of the best men, as we may see every day in very sad and melancholy instances: having taken all due care to inform our consciences aright, let us follow the judgment of our minds in what we do; and then we have done what we can to please God.

And if we would always take this care to keep a good conscience, we should always be easy, and good company
to

to ourselves: but if we offend our consciences, by doing contrary to the clear dictate and conviction of them, we make the unhappiest breach in the world; we stir up quarrel in our own breasts, and arm our own minds against ourselves; we create an enemy to ourselves in our own bosoms, and fall out with the best and most inseparable companion of our lives.

And on the contrary, a good conscience will be a continual feast, and will give us that comfort and courage in an evil day which nothing else can: and then whatever happens to us, we may *commit ourselves to God in our doing, as into the hands of a faithful creator*: to whom with our blessed SAVIOUR and Redeemer, and the Holy Ghost the Comforter, be all honour and glory, now and ever. Amen.



S E R M O N XXXIX.

How to keep a truly religious fast.

Preached before the Queen at Whitehall, September the 16th, 1690.

Z E C H. vii. 5.

Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, DID YE AT ALL FAST UNTO ME, EVEN UNTO ME?

IN the beginning of this chapter the people of the Jews, who were then rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, and had already far advanced the work, though it was not perfectly finished till about two years after, sent to the priests and the prophets, to inquire of them, whether they should still continue the fast of the fifth month, which they had begun in Babylon and continued to observe during the seventy years of their captivity, in remembrance of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem; or should not now rather turn it into a time of feasting and gladness?

IN this enquiry G O D by his prophet returns an answer in this, and the following chapter. And first he consults with them concerning those their monthly fasts, whether they did indeed deserve that name, and was not rather a mere shew and pretence of a religious observance. *verses 4, 5. Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying; Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye all fast unto me, even unto me?* The enquiry was particularly

ticularly concerning the fast of the fifth month, because the occasion of that was more considerable than of all the other; but the answer of **G O D** mentions the fasts of the fifth and seventh months, these two being probably observed with greater solemnity than the other.

But for our clearer understanding of this, it will be requisite to consider the original and occasion of all their monthly fasts: which, as appears from other places of scripture, in short, was this: when the Jews were carried away captive into Babylon, in a deep sense of this great judgment of **G O D** upon them for their sins, and of the heavy affliction which they lay under, they appointed four annual fasts, which they observed during their seventy years captivity, viz. the fast of the fourth month, in remembrance of the enemies breaking through the wall of Jerusalem, which we find mentioned, Jer. lii. 6, 7. The fast of the fifth month, in memory of the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, verses 12, 13. The fast of the seventh month, in remembrance of the slaying of Gedaliah, upon which followed the dispersion of the Jews, of which we have an account, Jer. xlii. 1, 2. And the fast of the tenth month, in memory of the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem, of which we find mention 2 Kings xxv. 1.

In this order we find these four annual fasts mentioned Zechar. viii. 19. not according to the order of the events but of the months of the several years in which the events happened: and there likewise **G O D** gives an answer to this enquiry concerning the continuance of these annual fasts, namely, that they should for the future be turned into solemn days of joy and gladness. *And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts.* Zech. viii. 18, 19.

I return now to the text, *Did ye at all fast unto me?* that is, did these fasts truly serve to religious end and purpose? Did not the people content themselves with a mere external shew and performance

without any inward affliction and humiliation of their souls, in order to a real repentance? Did they not still go on in their sins; nay, and add to them upon these occasions, fasting for strife, and debate, and oppression? In a word; were they not worse rather than better for them? And therefore GOD had no regard to them, as it follows in this chapter, verse 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. *Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying; Execute judgment, and shew mercy and compassion every man to his brother; and oppress not the widows nor the fatherless, the stranger nor the poor; and let none of you imagine mischief against his brother in your heart: but they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear; yea, they made their heart as an adamant-stone, lest they should hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent by his spirit in the former prophets: therefore it came great wrath from the LORD of hosts: therefore it shall come to pass, that as he cried and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts.*

So that notwithstanding these outward solemnities of fasting and prayer, here was nothing of a religious fast, and ye at all fast unto me, even unto me? They were sensible of the judgments of GOD which were broken in upon them, but they did not turn from their sins, but persisted still in their obstinacy and disobedience.

And what GOD here by the prophet Zechary calls fasting unto him, even unto him, the prophet Isaiah calls a fast which GOD hath chosen, and an acceptable day to the LORD. *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast as I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is it to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the needy, that are cast out to thy house; when thou seest the*

naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy salvation shall spring forth speedily: then shalt thou call and the LORD shall answer, &c.

From all which passages we may easily understand wherein these monthly fasts of the Jews were defective, and what was the fault that GOD finds with them when he expostulates so severely in the text: *When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even these seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?* In the general, the fault which GOD finds with them was this, that these solemnities did not serve any real end and purpose of religion, but failed in their main design, which was a sincere repentance and reformation of their lives: for which reason he tells them that they were not at all acceptable to him, nor esteemed by him as performed unto him, because they did not answer the true intention and design of them.

My work at this time shall be, first, to consider in general what it is to fast unto GOD, that is, to keep a truly religious fast. Secondly, to bring the matter nearer to ourselves, I shall consider more particularly, what the duty of this day, appointed by their majesties for a solemn humiliation and repentance throughout the nation, does require at our hands.

I. I shall consider in general what it is to fast unto GOD, that is, to keep a truly religious fast. And to this I shall give an account in the following particulars. First, a truly religious fast consists in the afflicting of our bodies by a strict abstinence, that so they may be fit and proper instruments to promote and help forward the growth and trouble of our minds. Secondly, in the humble confession of our sins to GOD with shame and confusion of face, and with a heavy contrition of sorrow for them. Thirdly, in an earnest deprecation of GOD's displeasure and humble supplications to him that he would avert his judgments and turn away his anger from us. Fourthly, in intercession with GOD for such spiritual and temporal blessings upon ourselves and others as are needful and convenient. Fifthly, in alms and charity to the poor.

that our humiliation and prayers may find acceptance with God. I do but mention these particulars, that I may more largely insist upon that which I mainly intended, and proposed to consider in the next place, namely,

II. What the duty of this day, appointed by their majesties for a solemn humiliation and repentance throughout the nation, doth require at our hands. And this I shall endeavour to comprize in the following particulars. First, that we should humble ourselves before God every one for his own personal sins, whereby he hath provoked God, and increased the publick guilt, and done his part to bring down the judgments and vengeance of God upon the nation. Secondly, that we should likewise heartily lament and bewail the sins of others; especially the great and crying sins of the nation, committed by all ranks and orders of men amongst us, and whereby the wrath and indignation of Almighty God hath been so justly incensed against us. Thirdly, we should most importunately deprecate those terrible judgments of God to which these our great and crying sins have so justly exposed us. Fourthly, we should pour out our earnest prayers and supplications to Almighty God for the preservation of their majesties sacred persons, and for the establishment and prosperity of their government, and for the good success of their arms and forces by sea and land. And fifthly, our fasting and prayers should be accompanied with charity and alms to the poor and needy. Lastly, we should prosecute our repentance and good resolutions to the actual reformation and amendment of our lives. Of these I shall, by God's assistance, speak as briefly and as plainly as I can, and so as every one of us may understand what God requires of him upon so solemn an occasion as this. First, we should humble ourselves before God every one for his own personal sins and miscarriages, whereby he hath provoked God, and increased the publick guilt, and done his part to bring down the judgments and vengeance of God upon the nation. Our humiliation and repentance should begin with ourselves and our own sins, because repentance is always designed to end in reformation; but there cannot be a general reformation without

the reformation of particular persons which do constitute and make up the generality.

And this Solomon prescribes as the true method of a national reformation, and the proper effect of a publick humiliation and repentance; in that admirable prayer of his at the dedication of the temple: *If there be, says he, in the land famine; if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust; or if there be caterpillar; or if their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities: whatever plague, whatever sickness there be; what prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel WHO SHALL KNOW EVERY MAN THE PLAGUE OF HIS OWN HEART, and spread forth his hands towards this house: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his way, whose heart thou knowest; for thou even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men; that they may fear thee, all the days which they live in the land which thou gavest to their fathers.* 1 Kings viii. 37, 38, 39, 40.

You see here that in case of any publick judgment or calamity the humiliation and repentance of a nation must begin with particular persons: *what prayer or supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel WHO SHALL KNOW EVERY MAN THE PLAGUE OF HIS OWN HEART: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive.* Particular persons must be convinced of their personal sins and transgressions, before God will hear the prayers, and forgive the sins of the nation.

And because we cannot perform this part of confessing and bewailing our own personal sins, and of testifying our particular repentance for them, in the publick congregation, any otherwise than by joining with them in a general humiliation and repentance; therefore we should do well, on the day before the publick fast, or at least the morning before we go to the publick assembly, to humble ourselves before God in our families, and especially in our closets; confessing to him, with great shame and sorrow, all the particular sins and offences, together with

the several aggravations of them, which we have been guilty of against the Divine Majesty, so far as we are able to call them particularly to our remembrance: and earnestly to beg of God the pardon and forgiveness of them, for his mercies sake in J E S U S C H R I S T.

And so likewise, after we return from the church, we should retire again into our closets, and there renew our repentance, with most serious and sincere resolutions of reforming in all those particulars which we have confessed and repented of. And if we would have our resolutions to come to any good, we must make them as distinct and particular as we can; and charge it upon ourselves, as to such and such sins, for which we have declared our sorrow and repentance, that we will amend and do better for the future.

And we should endeavour also, to fortify these good resolutions, in the best manner we can, by serious consideration, and by solemn promises of better obedience, and of more conscientious care of our lives and all our actions, for the future: and then, with the greatest earnestness and importunity, we should implore the assistance of God's grace and holy Spirit to this purpose.

By this means the great end of a solemn fast and humiliation will be in some good measure attained, and not wholly defeated, as for the most part it is, by being muddled up and lost in a confused and general repentance, which commonly ends together with the publick assembly, without any real and permanent effect upon particular persons: perhaps a great part of the congregation may have been in some degree sorry for their sins; but after all no man forsakes them, nor is the better for his sorrow, but leaves that behind him in the church, and carries home with him the same affection for his sins which he had before, and a secret resolution not to leave them.

Thus it was with the people of the Jews. They had their solemn monthly fast, in which they made a great show of humiliation, *hanging down their beads like a bullock for a day, and spreading sackcloth and ashes under them*; but there was no inward change of their minds, no

real reformation of their lives; and as soon as ever the publick solemnity was over, they turned every one to his former evil course. So God complains of them, Jer. viii. 6. *I hearken'd, says he, and I heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, what have I done? but they turned every one to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. They spake not aright, that is, they did not take the right method for an effectual repentance: they humbled themselves indeed before God, and repented at random for the sins of the nation in general, which they were all of them ready enough to acknowledge, and to lay a heavy load of guilt upon the community: but all this while they never reflected upon themselves in particular; they had no sense, no conviction of their own personal faults and miscarriages without which there can be no true general repentance: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, what have I done?*

And as they had no sense of their own particular sin which they had been guilty of, so they had no thought of leaving them; but as soon as ever the public fasting and humiliation was over, they returned to them again with the same eager and furious appetite; *they turned every one to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle*, that is without any consideration, or sense of danger.

Secondly, we should likewise upon this day, heartily lament and bewail the sins of others; especially the great and crying sins of the nation committed by all ranks and orders of men amongst us, and whereby the wrath and indignation of Almighty God hath been so justly incensed against us.

This hath been the temper and practice of good men in all ages, to be greatly troubled and afflicted for the sins of others as well as for their own; to mourn for them in secret, as the prophet Jeremy does for the obstinacy and impenitency of the Jews, and for the terrible judgments and calamities which their sins were ready to bring down upon them: *but if ye will not return*, says he to that obdurate people, Jer. xiii. 17. *my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride, or obstinacy; and mine eyes shall*

weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock is carried away captive. And indeed almost the whole prophecy of Jeremy, and his book of Lamentations are little else but a perpetual humiliation and mourning for the sins of that people, and for the judgments of God which he saw already inflicted, or foresaw to be coming upon them.

We read likewise of Lot, when he dwelt in Sodom, how he was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: for that righteous man, saith St. Peter, dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day, with their unlawful deeds.

Holy David also, upon all occasions, testifies his great trouble and grief for the sins which he saw committed by others, and was so affected with them, that he trembled at the very thought of them: *rivers of tears*, says he, *run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law*: Psalm. lxx. 36. and in the same psalm, ver. 53. *horror hath taken hold of me, because of the wicked which forsake thy law*, and again, ver. 158. *I beheld the transgressors and was grieved, because they kept not thy word*.

And how does Daniel humble himself before God and mourn, and in the name of all the people, and of all degrees and orders of men among them, take shame to himself and them, for the great sins which they had been guilty of? *We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly: O LORD, righteousness belongeth to thee, but unto us confusion of face, as at this day: to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee*. Dan. ix. 5, 7, 8.

With what trouble and confusion does Ezra, upon a solemn day of fasting and humiliation, acknowledge and bewail the sins of the people? *O my God*, says he, *I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee my God: for our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespasses grown up unto the heavens: since the days of our fathers, we have been in a great trespass unto this day; and now our iniquities have we, our kings and our priests, been numbered into the hands of the kings of the lands, &c.* Ezra. ix. 6, 7.

And

And thus also ought we, the people of this sinful land upon this solemn day of fasting and humiliation, to set our sins in order before us, with all their heinous aggravations; and in the bitterness of our souls to lament and bewail that general prevalence of impiety and vice, which hath over-spread the nation, and diffused itself through all ranks and degrees of men, magistrates, ministers, and people. I shall speak something more particularly concerning each of these.

1. The sins of the magistrates and those that are in authority. They that make laws for others, and are to see the execution of them, ought to be strict observers of them themselves. For it must needs put a man not a little out of countenance, to be severe upon those faults in others of which he knows himself to be notoriously guilty. And yet how many are there, whose place and duty it is to correct the vices and immoralities of others, who are far from being examples of virtue themselves? And therefore it is no wonder that there is so lame and unequal a distribution of justice in the nation, and that magistrates are so cold and slack in the discountenancing of vice and impiety, and in putting the good and wholsom laws made against them in execution: as against the profanation of the LORD's day by secular business, by vain sports and pastimes, which by the very nature of them are apt to dissolve the minds of men into mirth and pleasure, and to carry them off from all serious thoughts of God and religion, and from the meditations of another world; and to give the devil an advantage, and an opportunity, which he never fails to take, to steal the good seed, the word of GOD, which they have heard that day, out of their hearts, and to make it of none effect: and which is yet worse, by lewd and sinful practices, which are unlawful any time, but upon that day, are a double breach and violation of GOD's law.

And likewise by neglecting to put in execution the laws against profane swearing and cursing, for which the law mourns; and against drunkenness, and adultery, and fornication, which are so common, and so impudently committed amongst us: whether they be civil, or ecclesiastical.

ecclesiastical laws ; and it is hard to say which of them are most remissly executed.

And to mention no more, by neglecting to prosecute that horrible sin of murder, so frequently now committed in our streets beyond the example of former ages, with that severity and impartiality which is necessary to free the nation from the guilt of that crying sin, which calls aloud to heaven for vengeance.

And all this, notwithstanding the magistrates are under the oath of God to put the laws in due execution against all these crimes, so far as they come to their knowledge, and all under their cognisance.

2. The sins of the ministers, who serve at God's altar, and watch over the souls of men, whose blood will be required at their hands, if any of them perish through their fault and neglect. There is no reason to doubt, but that there is a good number of faithful shepherds in the land, who watch over their flocks with great care and conscience, remembering the dreadful account which they must one day make, to *him who shall judge the quick and dead*, of the souls committed to their charge.

But yet how grossly do many of us fail of the faithful discharge of the substantial parts of this high office? Wanting a just sense of the inestimable worth and value of the souls of men for whom CHRIST died ; taking little or no care to instruct them in the good knowledge of the LORD, and to lead them in the way to eternal happiness by an exemplary conversation.

Nay too many among us demean themselves so scandalously, as perfectly to undermine the credit and effect of their doctrine by leading lives so directly contrary to it ; and to alienate their people from the church, and to make them to abhor the sacrifice and service of the LORD by their wicked and unhallowed conversations : hereby exposing them to the craft of seducers, and rendring them easy prey to the emissaries of the church of Rome, or any other sect and faction that pretends a great zeal for religion, or makes a better shew of a strict and unblameable life.

For

For who will regard or believe those teachers, who give all the evidence that can be by their lives and actions, that they do not believe themselves and their own doctrines? When all is said, the life and manners of the preacher are the best eloquence, and have that dint and power of persuasion in them, which no words, no art can equal. Who so lives as he speaks, does, as it is said of our blessed SAVIOUR, *speaks as one that hath authority, and not as the scribes*: not as the scribes; whose words notwithstanding all the formality and gravity with which they were delivered, did therefore want weight and force because, as our SAVIOUR tells us of them, *they said, but they did not*; their lives were not answerable to their doctrines; whereas our blessed SAVIOUR therefore *spoke as never man spake*, because he lived as never man lived; so innocent, so useful, so exemplary a life: he *was holy, harmless, and undefiled*: he *did no sin, neither was guile found in his lips*: he *fulfilled all righteousness, and went about doing good*. This was that which made him so powerful preacher of righteousness; and we must necessarily fall much short of him in the authority and efficacy of our sermons, as we do in the holiness and goodness of our lives. Such a preacher, and such a practice as that of our blessed SAVIOUR was, is every way fitted to reprove, and persuade, and reform mankind.

We now live in an age and church, wherein they who are called to be the teachers and guides of souls ought to take great heed both to their doctrine and their lives: that the name of GOD may not be blasphemed, and his holy religion brought into contempt by those, who, above all others, are most nearly concerned to preserve and support the credit and honour of it.

And we cannot but see, how our religion and church are beset and endangered on every side; by the rude assaults of infidelity, and by the cunning arts of seducing spirits, and by our own intestine heats and divisions: and it can never be sufficiently lamented, no though it were with tears of blood, that we whose particular charge and employment it is to build up the souls of men in a holy faith, and in the resolution of a good life, should, for

want of due instruction, and by the dissolute and profligate lives of too many among us, and by inflaming our needless differences about lesser things, have so great a and in pulling down religion, and in betraying the souls of men either to downright infidelity, or to a careless neglect and profane contempt of all religion.

May not G O D justly expostulate this matter with us, as he did of old with the people of the Jews; Jer. v. 30, *a wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule in their means, and my people love to have it so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?* When they who are the pastors and guides of souls, have by their ill conduct and management brought matters to that pass, that the generality of the people sit down contented with the worst state of things, and are become almost indifferent whether they have any religion or not, what can the end of these things be, but that *the kingdom of G O D will be taken from you, and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits thereof?*

If ever there be a public reformation among us, it must begin at the house of G O D: and they who are the ministers of religion must lead on this work, and be more careful and conscientious in the discharge of that high and holy office which is committed to them by *the great shepherd and bishop of souls*. Else, what shall we say when G O D shall challenge us, as he once did the pastors of the Jewish church, by his prophet, saying, *where is thy flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee?* Jer. xiii. 20, 21.

3. The sins of the people; amongst whom there is almost an universal corruption and depravation of manners; so much that impiety and vice seem to have overspread the face of the nation; so that we may take up that sad complaint of the prophet concerning the people of Israel, and apply it to ourselves, Isai. i. 4, 5. *that we are a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil fruits; that the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is corrupt; and that from the sole of the foot even to the head, there*

there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.

We may justly stand amazed to consider, how *the God of all patience* is provoked by us every day; to think, how long he hath born with us and *suffered our manners*; our open profaneness, and infidelity; our great immoralities, and gross hypocrisy; our insolent contempt of religion, and our ill-favoured counterfeiting of it for low and sordid ends: and which is the most melancholy consideration of all the rest, we seem to be degenerated to that degree that it is very much to be feared, there is hardly integrity enough left amongst us to save us.

And then if we consider further our most uncharitable and unchristian divisions, to the endangering both of our reformed religion, and of the civil rights and liberties of the nation: our incorrigibleness under the judgments of God which we have seen abroad in the earth, and which have in a very severe and terrible manner been inflicted upon these kingdoms, that the *inhabitants thereof might learn righteousness*: our insensibleness of the hand of God so visible in his late providences towards us, and in the many merciful and wonderful deliverances which from time to time he hath wrought for us.

And lastly, if we reflect upon our horrible ingratitude to God our Saviour and mighty deliverer; and to them likewise whom he hath so signally honoured in making them the happy means and instruments of our deliverance: and this, not only expressed by a bold contempt of their authority, but by a most unnatural conspiracy against them with the greatest enemies not only to the peace of the nation, but likewise to the reformed religion therein professed and by law established; and to the interest of it all the world over.

So that we may say with Ezra, *and now, O our God, what shall we say unto thee after this?* Ezra ix. 6. And may not God likewise say to us, as he did more than once to the Jews? *Shall I not visit for these things, saith the LORD; and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*

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Thirdly, we should likewise, upon this day, earnestly deprecate God's displeasure, and make our humble supplications to him, that he would be graciously pleased to avert those terrible judgments which hang over us, and which we have just cause to fear may fall upon us; and that he would be intreated by us at last to be appeased towards us, and to turn from the fierceness of his anger.

This we find the people of God were wont to do upon their solemn days of fasting and prayer; and this God expressly enjoins, Joel ii. 15, 16, 17. *Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, &c. Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thy heritage to reproach, that the enemy should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, where is their GOD?*

And to this earnest deprecation of his judgments, God promiseth a gracious answer; for so it immediately follows, ver. 18. *then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people.*

And thus likewise Daniel, when he set his face to seek the LORD GOD, by prayer and supplications, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes, Daniel ix. 3. does in most humble and earnest manner deprecate the displeasure of God towards his people, and beg of him to remove his judgments, and to turn away his anger from them. Ver. 16, 17, 19. *O LORD, according to all thy righteousness I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy holy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquity of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O GOD, hear the prayer of thy servant and his supplication; and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary which is desolate, for the LORD's sake. O my GOD, incline thine ear and hear, open thine eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee, for our righteousness, but for thy great mercy: O LORD bear, O LORD*

forgive, O LORD bearken and do ; defer not for thine own sake, O my GOD ; for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.

And thus also should we, upon this solemn occasion, cry mightily unto GOD, and with the greatest importunity deprecate those terrible judgments which we so righteously have deserved, and to which the great and crying sins of the whole nation have so justly exposed us : humbly beseeching him, not for our righteousness, but for his great mercy ; for his own name's sake, and because we are his people and are called by his name, and because his holy truth and religion are professed amongst us ; that he would be pleased to hear the prayers of his servants and their supplications which they have made before him this day, *for the LORD's sake.*

Fourthly, we should likewise, upon this day, pour out our most earnest supplications to Almighty GOD, for the preservation of their majesties sacred persons, and for the prosperity and establishment of their government, and for the good success of their arms and forces by sea and land.

And more especially, since his majesty, with so many confederate princes and states of Europe, is engaged in a necessary an undertaking for the common good of Christendom, and for the mutual preservation and recovery of the respective rights : we should earnestly implore the favour and assistance of Almighty GOD in so just and glorious cause, against the common invader and oppressor of the rights and liberties of mankind.

And that of his infinite goodness he would be graciously pleased to take the person of our sovereign lord the king into the particular care and protection of his providence that he would secure his precious life from all secret attempts, and from open violence : that he would give his angels charge over him, and cover his head in the day of battle, and crown it with victory over his enemies, and restore him to us again in safety.

And that he would likewise preserve and direct the queen's majesty, in whose hands the administration of the government is at present so happily placed : that he would give her wisdom and resolution for such a time as the

and support and carry her through all the difficulties of it.

And, lastly, that he would bless them both with a long life, and a peaceful and happy reign over us; that *under them we may live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.*

Fifthly, our fasting and humiliation should be accompanied with our alms and charity to the poor and needy: and we should every one of us, according to the counsel given by the prophet to king Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv.

1. break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthning of our tranquillity: hereby intimating, that if there be any way to prevent or remove the judgments of GOD, and to prolong the tranquillity and happiness of prince and people, a sincere repentance, and a great charity to them that are in necessity and distress, are most likely to prevail with GOD, not only to respite the ruin of a sinful people, but to incline him to thoughts of peace towards them. For he promiseth to the Jews upon their sincere repentance, and earnest supplication to him, which are always accompanied with charity to the poor: Jer. xxix. 11, 12, 13. *For I know the thoughts which I think towards you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you the expected end: then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you; and ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with your heart.*

And I have often thought that the extraordinary charity of this whole nation, and of our pious princes, who are so ready to every good work, and such bright and shining examples in this kind, more than once so seasonably extended to the relief of our distressed brethren, who have hitherto for refuge from the rage and cruelty of their persecutors: I say, I have often thought, that this very thing, next to the infinite mercy and goodness of Almighty GOD, hath had a very particular influence upon our preservation and deliverance from those terrible calamities which were just ready to rush in upon us. And what cause have we to thank GOD, who hath allotted to

us this more blessed and merciful part, to give and not to receive; to be free from persecution ourselves, that so we might be in a capacity to give refuge and relief to them that were persecuted?

There are but few that have the faith to believe it, but certainly charity to the poor is a great security to us in times of evil: so David assures us, speaking of the righteous or charitable man; *he shall not, says he, be afraid in the evil time, and in the days of dearth he shall be satisfied.*

And so likewise in times of public distress, when we are beset with cruel and powerful enemies, who if God were not on our side would swallow us up, the public charity of a nation hath many times proved its best safeguard and shield: *it shall fight for thee, saith the son of Sirach, speaking of the charity of alms, against thine enemy, more than a mighty shield and strong spear.*

And of this, as I said before, I doubt not but we of this nation, by the great mercy and goodness of God to us, have had happy experience in our late wonderful deliverance under the conduct and valour of one of the best and bravest of princes; to whom, by too many among us the most unworthy and unthankful returns have been made for all the unwearied pains he hath undergone, and for the many and desperate hazards to which he hath exposed himself for our sakes, that ever were made to so great and generous a benefactor: to so great a benefactor I say, not only to these nations, but even to all Europe in asserting and maintaining their liberties against the insolent pride and unjust encroachments of one of the greatest oppressors the world hath known for many ages: to whom it may be said as Job doth of the Leviathan, *Job xli. 33, 34. upon the earth there is not his like: I am glorious without fear; but surely the next words are applicable enough, he beholdeth all high things, and is king of all the children of pride: and yet he that is higher than the highest even he that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh at him, he seeth that his day is coming.*

To conclude this particular; if we would have our prayers ascend up to heaven, and find acceptance there, our alms must go along with them: so the angel intimates when he says to Cornelius, *thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God*. Acts x. 4. Thy prayers and thine alms; they must go together if we desire that our prayers should be effectual. And the prophet Isaiah, speaking of the *fast which God hath chosen*, and which is acceptable to him, makes charity and alms a most essential part of it; *Is it not*, says he, *to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out of thy house; when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou bide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, here I am*. Isa. lviii. 7, 9.

Sixthly and lastly, we should prosecute our repentance and good resolutions to the actual reformation and amendment of our lives. For in this repentance doth mainly consist: this is the proper fruit and effect of all our humiliation and good resolutions, to forsake our sins, and to become better for the future; more pious and devout towards God, more sober and chaste with regard to ourselves, more just and charitable, more humble and meek towards all men: in a word, more innocent, more useful, and more *holy in all manner of conversation*.

And without this, all our fasting and humiliation, our most earnest prayers and supplications, will signify nothing: all our sorrow and tears will be but as water spilt upon the ground, and will not turn to an account either to save our own souls, or to preserve *this untoward generation, this crooked and perverse nation*, from ruin and destruction. So God tells Solomon, that this is the only way to appease and reconcile him to a sinful people: *my people which is called by my name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I bear in heaven, and forgive their sin, and heal their land*. 2 Chron. vii. 14.

And if this were the happy effect of our prayers and humiliation this day, to turn us from our wicked ways;

GOD would then turn away his anger from us ; and, as he promised to the Jews by the prophet Zachary, he would turn these our monthly fasts *into joy, and gladness, and cheerful feasts* ; Zech. viii. 19. as he hath in a great measure already done, *blessed be his great and glorious name.*

But if we will not hearken and obey, can we expect that GOD should deliver us from the hands of our enemies, that we may sin against him without fear all the days of our lives ? To what purpose should the providence of GOD take so much care to preserve our religion to us, when we make no better use of it for the direction and government of our lives ? When it serves most of us, only to talk of it ; and too many amongst us, to talk against it ; to deride it, and despitefully to use it. If this be the truth of our case, what can we say, why the kingdom of GOD should not be taken from us and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it ? What can we say, why our clandestick should not be removed, and the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST which we have so long enjoyed, and so long rebelled against, should not be utterly extinguished amongst us ?

And if I cannot prevail with you to come to these good resolutions, and to make them good : if you will not be persuaded to practise, yet be pleased to attend to what we say : hear our words at least, if ye will not do them. This the people of the Jews would do, when they were at the worst : So GOD tells the prophet concerning them : *they come unto thee, as the people cometh ; and they sit before thee, as my people ; and they hear thy words, but they will not do them.* Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

I had much rather at any time have occasion to praise than to reprove, especially in this great assembly : and yet it is not to be dissembled, that the behaviour of too many in this place is frequently so careless and irreverent as is very mis-becoming those who are in the more peculiar presence of the great and glorious *majesty of heaven and earth*, and profess at that very time to worship him.

I am sure, we have a better pattern perpetually before us ; of a decent and unaffected devotion, of a most fer-

ous and steady attention, without wandering, without diversion, and without drowsiness: such an example as I cannot but hope will in a short time gain upon us all, and by a more gentle and silent reproof win us to the imitation of it.

And if we could but be prevailed upon to demean ourselves with that reverence, and to hear with that attention, which becomes the worship and the word of God, it might then be hoped that we would consider what is said; and consideration would probably work conviction, and conviction bring us to a better mind, and to a firm purpose of doing what we are inwardly convinced is both our duty and our interest to do.

Let us then go away from this solemnity, with a resolution to do every one what we ought; truly and earnestly to repent us of our sins past, and to lead a new life for the future; to fear that great and terrible God, in whose presence we have humbled ourselves this day; and to turn to him that hath smitten us, lest we provoke him to punish us yet seven times more, and after that seven times more for our sins, and for our impenitency in them, till at last he make our plagues wonderful.

To conclude; let us every one, with that true penitence in Job, take words to ourselves, and say, surely it meet to be said unto God, *I have born chastisement, I will not offend any more; that which I see not, teach thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do no more. Oh! that there were such a heart in us, that it might be well with us, and with our children for ever.*

Which God of his infinite goodness grant, for his mercies sake in JESUS CHRIST: to whom with thee, O Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, both now and ever, Amen.

S E R M O N XL.

That GOD is the only happiness of man.

Preached before the Queen at Whitehall,
March 20, 1691-2.

P S A L M lxxiii. 25.

*Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon
earth that I desire besides thee.*

THE design of this psalm is to vindicate the goodness and justice of the divine providence, notwithstanding the prosperous state of the wicked and the afflicted condition of good men many times in this world. And in the first place, the psalmist, whoever he was, whether David or Asaph, lays down this for a most certain truth, that GOD is good to good men: *of a truth GOD is good to Israel, to such as are of a clean heart.* ver. 1.

And yet for all this he tells us, that at some times he was under no small temptation to question the truth of this principle, when he beheld the promiscuous dispensation of things here below; that the wicked are often prosperous, and good men exposed to great calamities in this life; as if GOD either neglected human affairs, or had a greater kindness for the workers of iniquity than for pious and good men: *as for me, my foot had well nigh slipped, for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.* ver. 2.

This, he says, was a very great stumbling-block to good men, and tempted them to doubt of the providence of GOD: *therefore his people return hither, and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them; and they say, doth GOD know, and is there knowledge in the most High?* ver. 3.

This sentence is somewhat obscurely rendered in our translation, so as to make the sense of it difficult; which is plainly this: *therefore his people return hither*; that is, therefore good men come to this, in the greatness of their affliction, and in the bitterness of their soul, to question God's knowledge and care of human affairs.

Behold, say they, these are the ungodly, and yet they are the prosperous in the world, they increase in riches. ver. 12. To what purpose then is it for any man to be religious and virtuous? *Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.* ver. 13. In vain have I endeavoured after purity of heart and innocency of life, since so little good comes of it; nay, so far from that, that I have been in continual trouble and affliction: *all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.* ver. 14.

Such thoughts as these often came into his mind, and gave him great trouble and disquiet: but he presently corrects himself: if I say I will speak thus, *I should offend against the generation of thy children*; ver. 15. that is, I should go against the sense of all pious and good men, who have always believed the providence of God notwithstanding this objection: which at last he tells us he had raised on purpose to try if he could find the solution of it; *I thought to know this, which was grievous in mine eyes.* ver. 16. And then he resolves all into the unsearchable wisdom of the divine providence, which if we fully understood from first to last, we should see good reason to be satisfied with the equity of it: *when I go into the sanctuary of God, then shall I understand the end of these things? How thou didst set them in slippery places, &c.* ver. 17, 18. This satisfied him, that whenever the secret design of God's providence should be unfolded, whether in this world or the other, how strange and cross soever things might seem to be at present, yet in the issue and conclusion it would appear, that neither are bad men so happy, nor good men so miserable, as at present they may seem to be.

So that upon a full debate of this matter, the psalmist concludes, that these objections against providence do
spring

spring from our ignorance, and short and imperfect view of things; whereas if we saw the whole design from beginning to end, it would appear to be very reasonable and regular. *Thus my heart was grieved; so foolish was I and ignorant, and as a beast before thee.* ver. 21. And in regard to himself, he tells us, that he saw great reason to acknowledge G O D's tender care over him in particular, and that he could find no security or comfort for himself, but in G O D alone: *Nevertheless I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me up by thy right hand: thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory;* ver. 23. as if he had said, I am sensible of thy constant presence with me, and care of me; and do intirely depend upon thy guidance and direction, not doubting but that my present troubles and afflictions will have a happy and glorious issue.

And at last he breaks out into a kind of exultation and triumph for the mighty consolation which he found in the firm belief of the being and providence of G O D as the great stay and support of his soul in the worst condition that could befall him; in the words of the text *whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.* If a man were to chuse happiness for himself, and were to ransack heaven and earth for it, after all his search and enquiry he would at last fix upon G O D as the chief happiness of man, and the true and only rest and center of our souls. This then is the plain meaning of the text, *that nothing in the world but G O D can make man happy: whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.*

That man of himself is not sufficient for his own happiness, is evident upon many accounts: because he is liable to so many evils and calamities, which he can neither prevent, nor remedy: he is full of wants which he cannot supply; compassed about with infirmities which he can only complain of, but is not able to redress: he is obnoxious to dangers which he must always fear, because he can never sufficiently provide against them.

Consider man by himself, and from under the conduct and protection of a superior and more powerful being, and he is in a most disconsolate and forlorn condition: secure of nothing that he enjoys, and liable to be disappointed of every thing that he hopes for: he is apt to grieve for what he cannot help, and perhaps the justest cause of his grief is that he cannot help it; for if he could, instead of grieving for it, he would help it: he cannot refrain from desiring a great many things which he would fain have, but is never likely to obtain, because they are out of his power; and it troubles him both that they are so, and that he cannot help his being troubled by it.

Thus man walketh in a vain shew, and disquieteth himself in vain; courting happiness in a thousand shapes, and the faster he follows it, the swifter it flies from him. Almost every thing promiseth happiness to us at a distance, such a step of honour, such a pitch of estate, such a fortune or match for a child: but when we come nearer to it, either we fall short of it, or it falls short of our expectation; and it is hard to say which of these is the greatest disappointment. Our hopes are usually bigger than an enjoyment can satisfy, and an evil long feared, which it may never come, is many times more painful and troublesome than the evil itself when it comes.

In a word, man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards. He comes into the world naked and unarmed, and from himself more destitute of the natural means of security and support than any other creature whatsoever, as it were on purpose to shew that he is more peculiarly the care of a superior providence: and as man, like all the creatures of this lower world, is only made to acknowledge a deity; so God in great wisdom hath so ordered things, that none of the other creatures should be so much need of him, and so much reason to acknowledge their necessary dependance upon him. So that the words of David are the very sense and voice of nature, declaring to us that mankind is born into the world upon terms of greater dependance upon the providence of God than

than other creatures: Psalm xxii. 9, 10, 11. *Thou art he, says David there to GOD, that tookest me out of the womb, thou madest me to hope, or thou didst keep me in safety, when I was upon my mother's breasts: I was cast upon thee from the womb, thou art my GOD from my mother's belly: be not far from me, for trouble is near.* Trouble is always near to us, and therefore it is happy for us that GOD is never far from any of us: *for in him we live, and move, and have our being.*

And when we are grown up, we are liable to a great many mischiefs and dangers, every moment of our lives and, without the providence of GOD, continually insecure not only of the good things of this life, but even of life itself: so that when we come to be men, we cannot but wonder how ever we arrived at that state, and how we have continued in it so long, considering the infinite difficulties and dangers which have continually attended us: that in running the gantlope of a long life, when so many hands have been lifted up against us, and so many strokes levelled at us, we have escaped so free, and with so few marks and scars upon us: that when we are besieged with so many dangers, and so many arrows of death are perpetually flying about us, to which we do so many ways lie open, we should yet hold out twenty, forty, sixty years, and some of us perhaps longer, and do still stand at the mark untouched, at least not dangerously wounded by any of them: and considering likewise the fearful and wonderful frame of a human body, this infinitely complicated engine; in which, to the due performance of the several functions and offices of life, so many strings and springs, so many receptacles and channels are necessary, and all in their right frame and order; and which, besides the infinite imperceptible and secret ways of mortality, there are so many sluices and flood-gates to let death in and life out, that it is next to a miracle though we take but little notice of it, that every one of us did not die every day since we were born: I say considering the nice and curious frame of our bodies, and the innumerable contingencies and hazards of human life which is set in so slippery a place, that we still continue

in the land of the living, we cannot ascribe to any thing but the watchful providence of Almighty God, *who holds our soul in life, and suffers not our foot to be moved.*

To the same merciful providence of God we owe, that whilst we continue in life we have any comfortable possession and enjoyment of ourselves and of that which makes us men, I mean our reason and understanding: that our imagination is not let loose upon us, to haunt and torment us with melancholick freaks and fears: that we are not delivered up to the horrors of a gloomy and guilty mind: that every day we do not fall into frenzy and distraction, which next to wickedness and vice is the worst calamity, and saddest disguise of human nature: I say, next to wickedness and vice, which is a wilful frenzy, a madness not from misfortune but from choice; whereas the other proceeds from natural and necessary causes, such as are in a great measure out of our power; so that we are perpetually liable to it, from any secret and sudden disorder of the brain, from the violence of a disease, or the vehement transport of any passion.

Now if things were under no government, what could hinder so many probable evils from breaking in upon us, and from treading upon the heels of one another? Like the calamities of Job, when *the hedge, which God had about him and all that he had, was broken down and removed.*

So that if there were no God to take care of us, we should be secure of no sort, no degree of happiness in this world; no not for one moment: and there would be no other world for us to be happy in, and to make amends to us for all the fears and dangers, all the troubles and calamities of this present life: for God and another world stand and fall together: without him there can be no life after this; and if our hopes of happiness were only in this life, man of all other beings in this lower world should certainly be the most miserable.

I cannot say that all the evils which I have mentioned should happen to all, if the providence of God did not govern the world; but that every man would be in dan-

ger of them all, and have nothing to support and comfort him against the fear of that danger. For the nature of man, considered by itself, is plainly insufficient for its own happiness; so that we must necessarily look abroad, and seek for it somewhere else: and who can shew us that good that is equal to all the wants and necessities, all the capacities and desires, all the fears and hopes of human nature? Whatsoever can answer all these, must have these following properties:

First, it must be an all-sufficient good.

Secondly, it must be perfect goodness.

Thirdly, it must be firm and unchangeable in itself.

Fourthly, it must be such a good as none can deprive us of, and take away from us.

Fifthly, it must be eternal.

Sixthly, it must be able to support and comfort us in every condition, and under all the accidents and adversities of human life.

Lastly, it must be such a good as can give perfect rest and tranquillity to our minds.

Nothing that is short of all this can make us happy, and no creature, no not the whole creation, can pretend to be all this to us. All these properties meet only in **GOD**, who is the perfect and supreme good; as I shall endeavour, in the following discourse, more particularly to shew; and consequently, *that God is the only happiness of man.*

I. First, GOD is an all-sufficient good. And this do import two things; wisdom to contrive our happiness, and power to effect it; for neither of these without the other is sufficient, and both these in the highest and most eminent degree are in **GOD**.

He is infinitely wise to design and contrive our happiness; because he knows what happiness is, and how to frame us so as to be capable of the happiness he designs for us; and how to order and dispose all other things, as that they shall be no hindrance and impediment to

He perfectly understands all the possibilities of things, and how to fit means to any end. He knows all our wants, and how to supply them; all our hopes and desires, and how to satisfy them: he foresees all the dangers and evils which threaten us, and knows how to prevent or divert them, if he thinks fit; or if he permit them to come, how to support us under them, or to deliver us out of them, or to turn them to our greater benefit and advantage in the last issue and result of things.

His wisdom cannot be surprised by any accident which he did not foresee, and which he is not sufficiently provided against. The wisdom of men is but short and imperfect, and liable to infinite errors and mistakes: in many cases men know not what is safest and best for them, nor whether this or that will conduce most to their happiness: nay it often happens that those very means which the wisest men chuse for their security do prove the occasions of their ruin, and they are thrown down by those very ways whereby they thought to raise and establish themselves.

Especially if GOD breathe upon the counsels of men, how are their designs blasted? How are they insatuated and foiled in their deepest contrivances, and *snared in the work of their own hands*? when it is of the LORD; the wisdom of the greatest politicians is turned into foolishness: *for there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the LORD.*

But the divine wisdom, being founded upon infinite knowledge, is thereby secured against all possibility of error and mistake. GOD perfectly knows the natures and the powers of all his creatures and therefore can never be mistaken in the use and application of them to any of his purposes: so that none of his designs of love and mercy to the sons of men can miscarry for want of good contrivance, or wise conduct.

And as he is perfectly wise to contrive our happiness, so he is infinitely powerful to effect it, and to remove out of the way all the obstacles and impediments of it. We may understand many times what would conduce to our happiness, but may not be able to compass it; but no-

thing is out of the reach of omnipotency ; many things are difficult to us, but nothing is too hard for God : many things are impossible with us, but *with God all things are possible*. For he is the fountain and original of all power, from whom it is derived, and upon whom it depends, and to whom it is perfectly subject and subordinate : he can do all things at once, and in an instant, and with the greatest ease ; and no created power can put any difficulty in his way, much less make any effectual resistance ; because omnipotency can check, and countermand, and bear down before it all other powers.

So that if God be on our side, who can be against us ? We may safely commit our souls into his hands, for *he is able to keep that which is committed to him*. He can give us all good things, and deliver us from all evil, for *his is the kingdom and the glorious power*. Though all creatures should fail us, we may rely upon God, and live upon his all-sufficiency for our supply ; and may say with the prophet, *though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither fruit be in the vine ; though the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields should yield no meat ; though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stalls ; yet would I rejoice in the LORD, and joy in the God of my salvation*.

II. Secondly, as God is an all-sufficient good, so he is perfect goodness. He is willing to communicate happiness to us, and to employ his power and wisdom for our good. He made us that he might make us happy, and nothing can hinder us from being so but ourselves. Such is his goodness, that *he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth* ; and when we have provoked him by our sins, *he is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance* : for *he delighteth not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live*. So that if any of us be miserable it is our own choice ; if we perish, our destruction is of ourselves : for as the wiseman, in one of the Apocryphal books, says excellently, *God made not death, neither*

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hath be pleasure in the destruction of the living: but men seek death in the error of their life, and pull destruction upon themselves, with the works of their own hands.

So great is the goodness of G o d to mankind, that he hath omitted nothing that is necessary to our happiness. He designed it for us at first, and to that end he hath endowed us with powers and faculties whereby we are capable of knowing, and loving, and obeying, and enjoying him the chief good. And when we had forfeited all this by the wilful transgression and disobedience of the first parents of mankind, and were miserably bruised and maimed by their fall, G o d of his infinite mercy was pleased to restore us to a new capacity of happiness, by sending his only son to suffer in our nature, and in our stead; and thereby to become *a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and the author of eternal salvation to them that believe and obey him.* And he hath likewise promised to give us his holy Spirit, to enable us to that faith and obedience which the gospel requires of us, as the necessary conditions of our eternal salvation.

III. Thirdly, G o d is also a firm and unchangeable good. Notwithstanding his infinite wisdom, and power, and goodness, we might be miserable if G o d were mutable. For that cannot be a happiness which depends upon uncertainties, and perhaps one of the greatest aggregations of misery is to fall from happiness, to have been once happy, and afterwards to cease to be so: and that would unavoidably happen to us, if the cause of our happiness could change, and the foundation of it be removed. If G o d could be otherwise than powerful, and wise, and good, all our hopes of happiness would be shaken, and would fall to the ground. But the divine nature is not subject to any change: as he is *the father of lights, and the author of every good and perfect gift, so with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* All the things of this world are mutable, and for that reason, had they no other imperfection belonging to them, cannot make us happy.

IV. Fourthly, GOD is such a good as none can deprive us of and take away from us. If the things of this world were unchangeable in their nature, and not liable to any decay, yet they cannot make us happy; because we may be cheated of them by fraud, or robbed of them by violence; but GOD cannot be taken from us. Nothing but our sins can part GOD and us: *who shall separate us*, saith the apostle, Rom. viii. 35. *from the love of GOD? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* We may be stripped of all our worldly comforts and enjoyments, by the violence of men; but none of all these can separate us from GOD; *I am persuaded*, as the apostle goes on with great triumph, ver. 38, 39. *that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers; nor height, nor depth, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of GOD which is in CHRIST JESUS, our LORD.* Nor any other creature: here is a sufficient induction of particulars, and nothing left out of this catalogue but one, and that is sin, which is none of GOD's creatures, but our own; this indeed deliberately consented to, and wilfully continued in, will finally part GOD and us, and for ever hinder us from being happy.

But if we be careful to avoid this, which only can separate between GOD and us, nothing can deprive us of him; the aids and influences of his grace none can intercept or hinder; the joys and comforts of his holy Spirit none can take from us: all other things may leave us and forsake us: we may be debarred of our best friends, and banished from all our acquaintance; but men can send us no whither from the presence of GOD: our communication with heaven cannot be prevented or interrupted. Our prayers and our souls will always find the way thither from the uttermost parts of the earth.

V. Fifthly, GOD is an eternal good: and nothing but what is so can make us happy. Man having an immortal spirit, and being designed for an endless duration, must have a happiness proportionable; for which reason nothing

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in this world can make us happy, because we shall abide and remain after it: when a very few years are past and gone, and much sooner for any thing we know, all the things of this world will leave us, or else we shall be taken away from them, *but GOD is from everlasting to everlasting: he is the same, and his years fail not: therefore well might David fix his happiness upon GOD alone, and say, Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee: when my heart faileth, and my strength faileth, GOD is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

VI. Sixthly, GOD is able to support and comfort us, in every condition, and under all the accidents and adversities of human life. Outward afflictions may hurt our body, but they cannot reach our soul; and so long as that remains unwounded, *the spirit of a man can bear his infirmities.* GOD is intimate to our souls, and hath secret ways whereby to convey the joys and comforts of his holy Spirit into our hearts, under the bitterest afflictions and sharpest sufferings: he can enable us by his grace *to possess our souls in patience*, when all other things are taken from us: when there is nothing but trouble about us, he can *give us peace and joy in believing*: when we are persecuted, afflicted, and tormented, he can give us that ravishing sight of the glories of another world, that steadfast assurance of a future blessedness, as shall quite extinguish all sense of present sufferings: how did many of the primitive Christian martyrs, in the midst of their torments, and under the very pangs of death *rejoice in the hope of the glory of GOD?*

There are none of us but may happen to fall into those circumstances of danger, and of bodily pains and sufferings, as to have no hopes of relief and comfort but from GOD; none in all the world to trust to but him only: and in the greatest evils that can befall us in this life, he is a refuge and sanctuary; and to repeat the words of the Psalmist after the text, *when our heart fails, and our strength fails, GOD is the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever,*

Now

Now what would any of us do in such a case, if we were not for GOD? Human nature is liable to desperate straits and exigencies: and he is not happy who is not provided against the worst that may happen. It is sad to be reduced to such a condition, as to be destitute of all comfort and hope: and yet men may be brought to that extremity, that if it were not for GOD they would not know which way to turn themselves, or how to entertain their thoughts with any comfortable consideration under their present anguish.

All men naturally resort to GOD in extremity, and cry out to him for help: even the most profane and atheistical, when they are destitute of all other comfort, will run to GOD, and take hold of him, and cling about him. But GOD *hath no pleasure in fools*; in those who neglect and despise him in their prosperity, though they owe him also intirely to him; but when the evil day comes, then they lay hold of him as their only refuge: when all things go well with them, *GOD is not in all their thoughts*; but in their affliction they will seek him early then they will cry, LORD, LORD; but he will say to them in that day, *depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, for I know you not.*

Here will be the great unhappiness of such persons that GOD will then appear terrible to them, so as they shall not be able, when they look up to him, to abide his frowns: and at the same time that they are forced to acknowledge him, and to supplicate to him for mercy and forgiveness, they shall be ready to despair of it: then those terrible threatnings of GOD's word will come to their minds; *because I called, and ye refused; I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye set at nought my counsel, and would have none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you: then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me for that they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the LORD: they would none of my counsel, they despised*

all my reproof: therefore shall they eat the fruit of their
own ways, and be filled with their own devices: the ease
of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools
shall destroy them. Prov. i. 24, 25, &c. To which I will
add that terrible passage in the prophet, concerning the
perverse and obstinate Jews, Isa. xxvii. 11. *they are a
people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will
not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will
show them no favour.* And men are miserable creatures
indeed, when God their maker doth abandon them, and
hath so far hardened his heart against them, that he can
have no pity and compassion for them.

VII. Seventhly and lastly, which is consequent upon
all the rest, God is such a good as can give perfect rest
and tranquillity to our minds. And that which cannot
do this, though it had all the properties before mention-
ed, cannot make us happy. For he is not happy who
does not think himself so, whatever cause he may have
to think so. Now what in reason can give us disquiet,
if we do firmly believe that there is a God, and that
his providence rules and governs all things for the best;
and that God is all that to good men which hath now
been said of him? Why should not our minds be in per-
fect repose, when we are secure of the chief good, and
we found out that which can make us happy, and is
willing to make us so, if we be not wanting to ourselves,
and by our wilful obstinacy and rebellion against him do
not oppose and frustrate this design?

If a considerate man were permitted to his own choice,
with the greatest good to himself that he could possibly
obtain; after he had searched heaven and earth, the re-
sult of all his wishes would be that there were just such
a being as we must necessarily conceive God to be: nor
could he chuse any other friend or benefactor; any other
protector for himself or governor for the whole world,
than an infinite power conducted and managed by infinite
wisdom and goodness; which is the true notion of a
God: after all his enquiry he would come to the psal-
mists conclusion here in the text, *whom have I in heaven*
but

but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.

Vain man is apt to seek for happiness elsewhere, but this proceeds from want of due consideration: for when all things are well weighed, and all accounts rightly call'd up and adjust'd, we shall at last settle in David's resolution of that question, *what is the chief good of man?* *There be many,* says he, *Psal. iv, 6, 7, 8. that say, will shew us any good?* that is, men are generally inquisitive after happiness, but greatly divided in their opinions about it: most men place it in the present enjoyments of this world, but David for his part pitches upon GOD, in whom he was fully convinced that the happiness of man does consist: *there be many that say, will shew us any good?* LORD, *lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us: thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased.* The great joy of the men of this world is in plentiful harvest, and the abundance of the good things of this life: but David had found that which gave more joy and gladness to his heart, the favour of GOD and the light of his countenance: this gave perfect rest and tranquillity to his mind, so that he needed not to enquire any further: for so it follows in the next words, *I will both lay me down in peace, and rest; for thou, LORD, makest me to dwell in safety:* the Hebrew word signifies confidence or security: here, and no-where else, his mind found rest, and was in perfect ease and security.

I shall now only make two or three inferences from this discourse, and so conclude.

First, this plainly shews us the great unreasonableness and folly of atheism, which would banish the belief of GOD and his providence out of the world: which, as is most impious in respect of GOD, so is it most malicious to men; because it strikes at the very foundation of happiness, and perfectly undermines it. For if there were no GOD, man would evidently be the most unhappy of all other beings here below; because his unhappiness would be laid in the very frame of his nature, in that which distinguishes him from all other beings below him, I mean

his reason and understanding: and he would be so much more miserable than the beasts, by how much he hath a farther reach, and a larger prospect of future evils; quicker apprehension, and a deeper and more lasting resentment of them.

So that if any man could see reason to stagger his belief of a God, or of his providence, as I am sure there is infinite reason to the contrary; yet the belief of these things so much for the interest, and comfort, and happiness of mankind, that a wise man would be heartily troubled to part with a principle so favourable to his quiet, and that does so exactly answer all the natural desires and hopes and fears of men, and is so equally calculated both for our comfort in this world, and for our happiness in the other. For when a man's thoughts have ranged and wandered as far as they can, his mind can find no rest, no probable foundation of happiness but GOD only; no other reasonable, no nor tolerable hypothesis and scheme of things for a wise man to rely upon, and to live and die by. For no other principle but this, firmly believed, and fully lived up to by an answerable practice, was ever able to support the generality of mankind, and to minister the consolation to them under the calamities of life, and the pangs of death.

And if there were not something real in the principles of religion, it is impossible that they should have so remarkable and so regular an effect to support our minds in every condition, upon so great a number of persons of different degrees of understanding, of all ranks and conditions, young and old, learned and unlearned, in so many distant places, and in all ages of the world, the records whereof are come down to us: I say so real, and so frequent, and so regular an effect as this is, cannot with any colour of reason be ascribed either to blind chance, or mere imagination, but must have a real, and regular, and uniform cause, proportionable to so great and general an effect.

I remember that Grotius, in his excellent book of the strength of the christian religion, hath this observation, that

GOD did not intend that the principles of religion should have the utmost evidence that any thing is capable of, and such as is sufficient to answer and bear down all sorts of captious cavils and objections against it ; but so much as is abundantly sufficient to satisfy a sober and impartial enquirer after truth, one that hath no other interest but to find out truth ; and when he hath found it, to yield to it if it were otherwise, and the principles of religion were as glaring and evident as the sun shining at noon-day, there could hardly be any virtue in such a faith, so infidelity would be next to an impossibility.

All that I would expect from any man, that shall say that he cannot see sufficient reason to believe the being and the providence of GOD, is this ; that he would offer some other principles ; that he would advance any other hypothesis and scheme of things, that is more agreeable to the common and natural notions of men, and to all appearances of things in the world ; and that does bid more fairly for the comfort and happiness of mankind, than these principles of the being of a GOD, and of his watchful providence over the children of men, do plainly do ; and till this be clearly done, the principles of religion which have generally been received by mankind, and have obtained in the world in all ages, cannot fairly be discarded, and ought not to be disturbed and put out of possession. And this, I think, puts this whole matter upon a very fair and reasonable issue, and that nothing more needs to be said concerning it.

Secondly, from what hath been said in the foregoing discourse, it naturally follows, that GOD is the only object of our trust and confidence, and therefore to him alone, and to no other, we ought to address all our prayers and supplications *for mercy and grace to help us in time of need.* But now, according to the doctrine and practice of the church of Rome, the psalmist here puts a very odd and strange question, *whom have I in heaven but thee ?* To which they must give a quite different answer from what the psalmist plainly intended ; namely, that GOD was the sole object of his

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hope and trust, and that upon him alone he relied as his only comfort and happiness: but to this assertion of the psalmist the church of Rome can by no means agree: they understand this matter much better than the psalmist did; namely, that besides God, there are in heaven innumerable angels and saints, in whom we are to repose great trust and confidence, and to whom also we are to address solemn prayers and supplications, not only for temporal good things, but for the pardon of our sins, for the increase of our graces, and for eternal life. That there are in heaven particular advocates and patrons for all exigencies and occasions, against all sorts of dangers and diseases, for all graces and virtues; and, in a word, for all temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings; to whom we may apply ourselves, without troubling God and our blessed SAVIOUR, who also is God *blessed for evermore*, by presuming upon every occasion to make our immediate addresses to him: for as they would make us believe, though Abraham was ignorant of it, and David knew it not, the blessed spirits above, both angels and saints, do not only intercede with God for us for all sorts of blessing, but we may make direct and immediate addresses to them to bestow these blessings upon us: for so they do in the church of Rome, as is evident, beyond all denial, from several of their prayers in their most publick and authentick liturgies.

They would indeed fain palliate this matter, by telling us, that by these direct and immediate addresses to angels and saints to bestow grace and eternal life upon them, they mean no more but only to pray to them that they would be pleased to intercede with God for these blessings to be bestowed upon them by their mediation: but if they mean no more, why do they say more than they mean? Why do they use such expressions as to the common sense and understanding of mankind do signify a great deal more than they say they mean; such expressions, as they themselves do acknowledge, if they be understood according to the most obvious sense of the words, would render them guilty of flat idolatry? Especially when they

know, that they are charged with idolatry upon this account; and since to clear themselves of it they will not alter their prayers, they justly lie under the suspicion of it.

And yet admitting what they say in this matter to be true, and that by these expressions in their prayers they intend no more but their solemn invocation of angels and saints, that they would intercede with GOD to bestow these blessings upon them for the sake of their merits, and upon their mediation: yet this surely is a great deal too much, and cannot be done without a high entrenchment upon the office of the only mediator between GOD and man, the man CHRIST JESUS: but let them not deceive themselves, GOD is not mocked: the LORD our GOD is a jealous GOD, and he will not give his glory to another.

I have not yet instanced in the grossest part of their superstition, not to say downright idolatry, in this kind; I mean, in their extravagant worship of the blessed virgin and mother of our LORD; whom they blasphemously call the queen of heaven; and whom, by a new stile, unknown to the scriptures and primitive antiquity, they think to dignify with the modish title of our lady; as if that could be any addition of honour to her, whom the angel declared to be *blessed among women*: who, if she know any thing of the follies of her worshippers here below, with what disdain and indignation do we think she hears those infinite prayers that are made to her, and that sacrilegious worship which is given her in that church and which makes both pages of their religion; and which for the frequency of it, both in their publick and private devotions, is very much beyond what they give to GOD and CHRIST? As if there were *none in heaven but she* nor *any thing upon earth* to be worshipped in company of her image.

Nay, so far have they carried this extravagant folly and how much farther they would have carried it, had not the reformation given a check to it, GOD only knows: so far, I say, have they proceeded in this folly as, in that famous book of their devotions, called *Our Lady's*

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lady's psalter, not only to apply to her some part of this psalm, out of which I have taken my text, beginning it thus: *How good is God to Israel, to them that worship his blessed mother?* But they have likewise profanely burlesqued, I cannot afford it a better term, this whole book of psalms, applying to her almost the highest things that are there said concerning God and our blessed SAVIOUR. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, and be ye horribly astonished, to see the best and wisest religion in the world transformed into superstition and folly; and to see the most learned persons in that communion set themselves in good earnest to justify all these follies and absurdities, by a grave and groundless pretence to infallibility.

Thirdly and lastly, this shews us how necessary the favour of God is to every man's happiness: and there is but one way to gain his friendship and favour, by becoming holy and good as he is: then may we rejoice and glory in God, as the psalmist here does, and say, *Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.* A wicked man dreads God above all things in the world, and he has great reason to do so: for he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him: the foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity. When by sin we depart from God, we forsake our own happiness: *salvation is far from the wicked*, says David, Psal. lxxix. And again, a little after the text, *they that are far from thee shall perish, but it is good for me to draw near to God.* Now by holiness and goodness we draw near to him, who alone can make us happy.

It is certainly the common interest of mankind there should be a God, because we cannot possibly be happy without him: but then it is no man's interest to be wicked, because thereby we make him our enemy in whose favour is life, and upon whom all our hopes of happiness do depend.

To conclude, if we would have God for our happiness, we must be sure to make him our friend; and then

we may promise to ourselves all those advantages which the friendship of so great and powerful a patron can give us : and there is but one way to establish a firm friendship between GOD and us, and that is, by doing his will, and living in obedience to his laws : *Ye are my friends*, saith our blessed LORD, *if ye do whatsoever I command you* : *This is the love of GOD*, saith St. John, *that we keep his commandments* : and to love GOD is the way to be made partakers of those glorious things which GOD hath prepared for them that love him : such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man : which GOD of his infinite goodness grant we may all at last be partakers of, for his mercies sake in JESUS CHRIST ; to whom with thee, O FATHER, and the HOLY GHOST, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.



S E R M O N

S E R M O N XLI.

A thanksgiving-sermon for the late
victory at sea.

Preach'd before the QUEEN at *Whitehall*,
March the 20th, 1682.

J E R. ix. 23, 24.

Thus saith the LORD, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD, which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

THese words are a message from GOD, sent by his prophet to the people of the Jews, who trusted in their own wisdom, and might and riches, for their safety and preservation from that destruction which, in the former part of this chapter, GOD had threatened to bring upon them by the king of Babylon. To take them off from this vain confidence is this message sent to them, *Thus saith the LORD, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD, which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.*

In the handling of these words, I shall abstract from the particular occasion of them, and only consider the general truth contained in them: which I shall do under these two heads,

First, what we are not to glory in: *let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches.*

Secondly, what it is that is the matter of true glory: *but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me; that I am the LORD, which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth.*

I. *What we are not to glory in.* The text instanteth in three things which are the great idols of mankind, and in which they are very apt to pride themselves, and to place their confidence; namely, wisdom, and might, and riches. I shall consider these severally, and shew how little reason there is to glory in any of them.

1. *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom.* This may comprehend both human knowledge, and likewise prudence in the management of affairs. We will suppose both these to be intended here by the name of wisdom, *let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*; that is, neither in the largeness and compass of his knowledge, and understanding, nor in his skill and dexterity in the contrivance and conduct of human affairs; and that for these two reasons.

First, because the highest pitch of human knowledge and wisdom is very imperfect.

Secondly, because when knowledge and wisdom are attained with much difficulty in any competent measure attainable, how easily are they lost?

First, the highest pitch of human knowledge and wisdom is very imperfect. Our ignorance doth vastly exceed our knowledge at the best. Wisdom in any tolerable degree is difficult to be attained, but perfection is utterly to be despaired of. Where is there to be found so strong and sound a head, as hath no soft place: so perfect, so clear an understanding as hath no flaw, no dark water in it? How hard a matter is it to be true and wise? And yet there are so many pretenders to wisdom as would almost tempt a man to think that nothing is so easy. Men do frequently murmur and repine at the unequal distribution of other things, as of health and strength,

strength, of power and riches: but if we will trust the judgment of most men concerning themselves, nothing is more equally shared among mankind than a good degree of wisdom and understanding. Many will grant others to be superior to them in other gifts of nature, as in bodily strength and stature; and in the gifts of fortune, as in riches and honour; because the difference between one man and another in these qualities is many times so gross and palpable, that no body hath the face to deny it: but very few in comparison, unless it be in mere compliment and civility, will yield others to be wiser than themselves; and yet the difference in this also is for the most part very visible to every body but themselves.

So that true wisdom is a thing very extraordinary. Happy are they that have it: and, next to them, not those many that think they have it, but those few that are sensible of their own defects and imperfections, and know that they have it not.

And among all the kinds of wisdom none is more nice and difficult, and meets with more frequent disappointments, than that which most men are apt to pride themselves in, I mean political wisdom and prudence; because it depends upon so many contingent causes, any one of which failing the best laid design breaks and falls in pieces: it depends upon the uncertain wills and fickle humours, the mistaken and mutable interests of men, which are perpetually shifting from one point to another, so that no body knows where to find them: besides an unaccountable mixture of that which the heathen called fortune, but we Christians by its true name, the providence of God; which does frequently interpose in human affairs, and loves to confound the wisdom of the wise, and to turn their counsels into foolishness.

Of this we have a most remarkable example in Achitophel, of whose wisdom the scripture gives this extraordinary testimony, that *the counsel which he counselled in those days was as if one had enquired at the oracle of God: such was all the counsel of Achitophel both with David and with Absalom.* It seems he gave very good counsel also to Absalom, and because he would not follow it,

it, was discontented to that degree as to lay violent hands upon himself: and now who would pride himself in being so very wise as to be able to give the best counsel in the world, and yet so very weak as to make away himself, because he to whom it was given was not wise enough to take it?

The like miscarriages often happen in point of military skill and prudence. A great prince or general is sometimes so very cautious and wary, that nothing can provoke him to a battle; and then at another time, and perhaps in another element, so rash and wilful that nothing can hinder him from fighting and being beaten: as if the two elements made the difference; and caution were great wisdom at land, and confidence and presumption great prudence at sea. But the true reason of these things lies much deeper, in the secret providence of Almighty God, who when he pleases can so govern and over-rule both the understandings and the wills of men, as shall best serve his own wise purpose and design.

And as the highest pitch of human wisdom is very imperfect in itself, so it is much more so in comparison with the divine knowledge and wisdom: compared with this it is mere folly, and less than the understanding and wisdom of a child to that of the wisest man. *The foolishness of God*, says St. Paul, *is wiser than men*, 1 Cor. i. 25. that is, the least grain of divine wisdom is infinitely beyond all the wisdom of men: but in opposition to the wisdom of God, the wisdom of men is less than nothing and vanity. Let men design things never so prudently, and make them never so sure, even to the Popish and French degree of infallibility; let them reckon upon it as a blow that cannot fail: yet after all, the counsel of the LORD that shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure; *for there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the LORD.*

And now we may ask the question which Job does, *where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?* And we must answer it as he does, *it is not to be found in the land of the living*, Job xxviii. 12, 13. unless it be that one infallible point of wisdom

to which GOD directs every man, and of which every man is capable, viz. religion and the fear of GOD, unto man be said, *behold! the fear of the LORD, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* Job xxviii. 28.

Secondly, when knowledge and wisdom are with great difficulty in any competent measure attained, how easily are they lost? By a disease, by a blow upon the head; by a sudden and violent passion, which may disorder the strongest brain, and confound the clearest understanding in a moment: nay even the excess of knowledge and wisdom, especially if attended with pride, as too often it is, is very dangerous, and does many times border upon distraction and run into madness: like an athletick constitution and perfect state of health, which is observed by physicians to verge upon some dangerous disease, and to be a forerunner of it.

And when a man's understanding is once craz'd and shattered, how are the finest notions and thoughts of the wisest man blunder'd and broken, perplexed and entangled? Like a puzzled lump of silk, so that the man cannot draw out a thought to any length, but is forced to break it off and to begin at another end. Upon all which and many more accounts, *let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*, which is so very imperfect; so hard to be attained, and yet so easy to be lost.

2. *Neither let the mighty man glory in his might*, which whether it be meant of natural strength of body, or of military force and power, how weak and imperfect is it, and how frequently foiled by an unequal strength?

If we understand it of the natural strength of mens bodies, how little reason is there to glory in that, in which so many of the creatures below us do by so many degrees excel us? In that, which may so many ways be lost; by sickness, by a maim, and by many other external accidents; and which however will decay of itself, and by age sink into infirmity and weakness.

And how little reason is there to glory in that, which is so frequently foiled by an unequal strength? Of which Holiath is a famous instance. When he defied the host of

of Israel, and would needs have the matter decided by single combat, G O D inspired David to accept the challenge; who though he was no wise comparable to him in strength, and would have been nothing in his hands in close fight, yet G O D directed him to assail him at a distance by a weapon that was too hard for him, a stone out of a sling, which struck the giant in the forehead, and brought his unwieldy bulk down to the earth.

Or if by might we understand military force and power, how little likewise is that to be gloried in? Considering the uncertain events of war, and how very often and remarkably the providence of G O D doth interpose to cast the victory on the unlikely side. It is Solomon's observation, that such are the interpositions of divine providence in human affairs, that the event of things is many times not at all answerable to the power and probability of second causes: *I returned*, says he, *and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*. Eccl. ix. 11.

And one way, among many others, whereby the providence of G O D doth often interpose to decide the event of war, is by a remarkable change of the seasons and weather in favour of one side: as by sending great snows or violent rains, to hinder the early motion and march of a powerful army, to the disappointment or prejudice of some great design: by remarkable winds and storms at sea, to prevent the conjunction of a powerful fleet, and by governing all these for a long time together so visibly to the advantage of one side as utterly to defeat the well laid design of the other. Of all which, by the great mercy and goodness of G O D to us, we have had the happy experience in all our late signal deliverance and victories.

And here I cannot but take notice of a passage to this purpose in the book of Job: which may deserve our more attentive regard and consideration, because I take this book to be incomparably the most ancient of all other, and much elder than Moses: and yet it is written with as lively a sense of the providence of G O D, and as noble figures and flights of eloquence as perhaps any book

stant in the world. The passage I mean is, where God, to convince Job of his ignorance in the secrets of nature and providence, poseth him with many hard questions, and with this amongst the rest, *Hast thou entred into the treasures of the snow? Hast thou seen the treasures of the hail? which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war.* Job xxxviii. 22, 23. The meaning of which is, that the providence of God both sometimes interpose to determine the events of war, by governing the seasons of the weather, and by making the snows and rains, *the winds and storms to fulfil his word,* and to execute his pleasure.

Of this we have a remarkable instance in the defeat of Sisera's mighty army; against whom, in the song of Deborah, the stars are said to *have fought in their courses*: the expression is poetical, but the plain meaning of it is, that by mighty and sudden rains, which the common opinion did ascribe to a special influence of the planets, the river of Kishon, near which Sisera's army lay, was so raised and swoln as to drown the greatest part of that huge host. For so Deborah explains the *fighting of the stars in their courses against Sisera*: *they fought*, says she, *from heaven, the stars in their courses fought against Sisera, the river of Kishon swept them away*: as if the stars, which were supposed by their influence to have caused those sudden and extraordinary rains, had set themselves in battle-array against Sisera and his army.

Therefore, *let not the mighty man glory in his might*, which is so small in itself, but in opposition to God is weakness and nothing. *The weakness of God*, says St. Paul, *is stronger than men.* All power to do mischief is but impotence, and therefore no matter of boasting: *thy boastest thou thyself, thou tyrant, that thou art able to do mischief? The goodness of God endureth continually.* Psalm lii. 1. The goodness of God is too hard for the pride and malice of man, and will last and hold out when that has tired and spent itself.

Thirdly, *let not the rich man glory in his riches.* In these, men are apt to pride themselves: even the meanest and poorest spirits, who have nothing to be proud of but their

their money, when they have got good store of that together, how will they swell and strut? as if because they are rich and increased in goods they wanted nothing.

But we may do well to consider, that riches are things without us; not the real excellencies of our nature, but the accidental ornaments of our fortune. If they descend upon us, they are the privilege of our birth, not the effect of our wisdom and industry; and those things in the procurement whereof we had no hand, we can hardly call our own: and if they be the fruit of our own prudent industry, that is no such matter of glorying, because men of much slower understandings do commonly out-do others in diligence and drudging, their minds lying more level to the low design of being rich.

At the best, riches are uncertain. *Charge them, says St. Paul, that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches:* men have little reason to pride themselves, or to place their confidence in that which is uncertain, and even next to that which is not: So the wise man speaks of riches, *what thou set thine heart upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings, and fly as an eagle towards heaven.* Prov. xxiii. 5. He expresses it in such manner, as if a rich man sat brooding over an estate that it was fledg'd and had gotten itself wings to fly away.

But that which is the most stinging consideration of all is, that many men have an evil eye upon a good estate; so that instead of being the means of our happiness, it may prove the occasion of our ruin: so the same wise man observes, *there is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.* Eccl. v. 13. And it is not without example, that a very rich man hath been excepted out of general pardon, both as to life and estate, for no other visible reason but his vast and over-grown fortune: Solomon observes to us again, *such are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain, which taketh away the life of the owners thereof.* Prov. i. 18. And why should a man be proud of his danger, of that which one time

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other may be the certain and only cause of his ruin? A man may be too rich to be forgiven a fault which would never have been prosecuted against a man of a middle fortune. For these reasons, and a great many more, *let not the rich man glory in his riches.*

II. I proceed to consider, what it is that is matter of true glory. *But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD, which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.*

That he understandeth and knoweth me: here are two words used to express the thing more fully, understanding and knowledge; which seem not only to import right apprehensions of the being, and providence, and perfections of GOD; but likewise a lively sense of these things, and affections suitable to these apprehensions.

That he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD, that is the creator, and the sovereign governor of the world.

Which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth.

The best knowledge of religion, and that which is the foundation of all the rest, is the knowledge of the divine nature and perfections: especially of those which are most proper for our imitation; and such are those mentioned in the text, loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness: which we may distinguish thus: loving-kindness comprehends GOD's milder attributes, his goodness, and mercy, and patience: judgment signifies his severer dealings with men, whether in the chastisement of his people, or in the remarkable punishment of great offenders for example and warning to others: righteousness seems to be a word of a larger signification, and to denote that universal rectitude of the divine nature which appears in all the administrations of the providence here below; for the text speaks of the exercise of these perfections in this world: *Which exercise loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth.*

Several of the perfections of the divine nature are incommunicable to a creature, and therefore cannot be thought to be proposed to us for a pattern; as self-existence, independence, and all-sufficiency; the eternity, and the immensity of the divine being; to be the original cause of all other things, and the sovereign governor of the whole world: for **GOD** only is sufficient for that; and to be a match for all the world, a *nec pluribus impar*, is not a motto fit for a mortal man. A creature may swell with pride till it burst, before it can stretch itself to this pitch of power and greatness: it is an insufferable presumption, and a sottish ignorance of the necessary bounds and limits of our being, to think to resemble **GOD** in these perfections: this was the ambition of Lucifer, to ascend into heaven, and to be like the most high.

In our imitation of **GOD** we must still keep within the station of creatures; not affecting an independency and sovereignty like **GOD**, and to be omnipotent as he is: *Hast thou an arm like GOD, and canst thou thunder with a voice like him?* as **GOD** himself argues with Job. Job xl. 9.

For in these things I delight, saith the LORD. **GOD** takes pleasure to exercise these perfections himself, and to see them imitated by us; and the imitation of these divine perfections is our perfection and glory; in comparison of which all human wisdom, and power, and riches, are so far from being matter of glory, that they are very despicable and pitiful things: knowledge and skill to devise mischief, and power to effect it, are the true nature and character of the devil and his angels: those apostate and accursed spirits, who in temper and disposition are most contrary to **GOD**, who is the rule and pattern of all perfection.

I shall only make two observations or inferences from what hath been said, and then apply the whole discourse to the great occasion of this day: and they are these.

First, that the wisest and surest reasonings in religion are grounded upon the unquestionable perfections of the divine nature.

Secondly

Secondly, that the nature of God is the true idea and pattern of perfection and happiness.

First, that the wisest and surest reasonings in religion are grounded upon the unquestionable perfections of the divine nature: upon those more especially which to us are most easy and intelligible: such as are those mentioned in the text. And this makes the knowledge of God, and of these perfections, to be so useful and so valuable: because all religion is founded in right notions of God, and of his perfections: insomuch that divine revelation itself does suppose these for its foundation, and can signify nothing to us unless these be first known and believed: for unless we be first firmly persuaded of the providence of God, and of his particular care of mankind, why should we suppose that he makes any revelation of his will to us? Unless it be first naturally known that God is a God of truth, what ground is there for the belief of his word? So that the principles of natural religion are the foundation of that which is revealed: and therefore nothing can in reason be admitted to be a revelation from God, which does plainly contradict his essential perfections.

Upon this principle, a great many doctrines are without more ado to be rejected, because they do plainly and at first sight contradict the divine nature and perfections. I will give a few instances, instead of many that might be given.

In virtue of this principle I cannot believe, upon the pretended authority or infallibility of any person or church, that force is a fit argument to produce faith: no man shall ever persuade me, no not the bishop of Meaux with all his eloquence, that prisons and tortures, dragoons and the galleys, are proper means to convince the understanding, and either Christian or human methods of converting men to the true religion.

For the same reason I cannot believe, that God would not have men to understand their publick prayers, nor the lessons of scripture which are read to them: because a lesson is something that is to be learnt, and therefore a

lesson that is not to be understood is nonsense ; for if it be not understood how can it be learnt ?

As little can I believe, that GOD, who caused the holy scriptures to be written for the instruction of mankind, did ever intend that they should be locked up and concealed from the people in an unknown tongue.

Least of all can I believe that doctrine of the council of Trent, that the saving efficacy of the sacraments doth depend upon the intention of the priest that administers them : which is to say, that though the people believe and live never so well, yet they may be damned by shoals, and whole parishes together, at the pleasure of the priest : and this for no other reason, but because the priest is so cross and so cruel that he will not intend to save them.

Now can any man believe this that has any tolerable notion either of the goodness or justice of GOD ? May we not appeal to GOD in this, as Abraham did in another case ? *Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked ? That be far from thee, to do after this manner : shall not the judge of all the earth do right ?* Much more, to destroy the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous and innocent people should lie at the mercy and will of a wicked and perverse priest, to be saved or damned by him as he thinks fit, *that be far from thee : shall not the judge of all the earth do right ?* For, to drive the argument to the head, if this be to do right there is no possibility of doing wrong.

Thus in things which are more obscure we should govern all our reasonings concerning GOD and religion by that which is clear and unquestionable, and should with Moses lay down this for a certain principle, *all his ways are judgment, a GOD of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he :* and say with St. Paul, *is there then unrighteousness with GOD ? GOD forbid !* And again, *we know that the judgment of GOD is according to truth.*

2dly, The other inference is this, that the nature of GOD is the true idea and pattern of perfection and happiness : and therefore nothing but our own conformity to

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it can make us happy : and for this reason, to understand and know God is our great excellency and glory, because it is necessary to our imitation of him who is the best and happiest being. And so far as we are from resembling God, so far are we distant from happiness and the true temper of the blessed. For goodness is an essential ingredient of happiness ; and as without goodness there can be no true majesty and greatness, so neither any true felicity and blessedness.

Now goodness is a generous disposition of mind to diffuse and communicate itself by making others to partake of our happiness, in such degrees as they are capable : for no being is so happy as it might be, that hath not the power and pleasure to make others happy : this surely is the highest pleasure, I had almost said pride, of a great mind.

In vain therefore do we dream of happiness in any thing without us. Happiness must be within us ; the foundation of it must be laid in the inward frame and disposition of our spirits : and the very same causes and ingredients which make up the happiness of God must be found in us, though in a much inferior degree, or we cannot be happy. They understand not the nature of happiness, who hope for it upon any other terms : he who is the author and fountain of happiness cannot convey it to us by any other way, than by planting in us such dispositions of mind as are in truth a kind of participation of the divine nature, and by enduing us with such qualities as are the necessary materials of happiness : and a man may as soon be well without health as happy without goodness.

If a wicked man were taken up into heaven, yet if he still continue the same bad man that he was before, *caelum, non animum mutavit*, he may have changed the climate, and be gone into a far country ; but because he carries himself still along with him, he will still be miserable from himself : because the man's mind is not changed all the while, which would signify a thousand times more to his happiness, than change of place, or of any outward

circumstances whatsoever: for a bad man hath a fiend in his own breast, and the fuel of hell in his guilty conscience.

There is a certain kind of temper and disposition which is necessary and essential to happiness, and that is holiness and goodness, which is the very nature of GOD; and so far as any man departs from this temper, so far he removes himself and runs away from happiness. And here the foundation of hell is laid, in the evil disposition of a man's own mind, which is naturally a torment to itself: and till this be cured, it is as impossible for him to be happy, as for a limb that is out of joint to be at ease; because the man's spirit is out of order, and off the hinges, and as it were tossed from its center; and till that be set right and restored to its proper and natural state, the man will be perpetually unquiet, and can have no rest and peace within himself. *The wicked, saith the prophet, is like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest: there is no peace, saith my GOD, to the wicked: no peace with GOD, no peace with his own mind; for a bad man is at perpetual discord and wars within himself: and hence, as St. James tells us, come wars and fightings without us, even from our lusts which war in our members.*

And now that I have mentioned wars and fighting without us, this cannot but bring to mind the great and glorious occasion of this day: which gives us manifold cause of praise and thanksgiving to Almighty GOD: for several wonderful mercies and deliverances; and more particularly, for a most glorious victory at sea, vouchsafed to their majesties fleet in this last summer's expedition.

For several great mercies and deliverances: for a wonderful deliverance indeed, from a sudden invasion designed upon us by the inveterate and implacable enemies of our peace and religion; which by the merciful providence of GOD was happily and strangely prevented, when it was just upon the point of execution.

Next, for the preservation of our gracious sovereign from that horrid and most barbarous attempt designed

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upon his sacred person : and from those great and manifold dangers to which he was exposed in his late tedious expedition : and for his safe and most welcome return to us.

And lastly, for a most glorious victory at sea: the greatest and the cheapest that ever the sun saw, from his first setting out to run his course. The opportunity indeed of this victory was through the rashness and confidence of our enemies, by the wise providence of God, put into our hands: but the improvement of this opportunity into so great and happy a victory we owe, under God, to the matchless conduct and courage of the brave admiral, and to the invincible resolution and valour of the captains and seamen.

This great deliverance from the designed invasion, and this glorious victory, God vouchsafed to us at home, whilst his sacred majesty was so freely hazarding his royal person abroad, in the publick cause of the rights and liberties of almost all Europe.

And now what may God justly expect from us, as a meet return for his goodness to us? What? but that we should glorify him, first by offering praise and thanksgiving; and then, by ordering our conversation aright, that he may still delight to show us his salvation.

God might have stood aloof from us in the day of our distress, and have said to us, as he once did to the people of Israel, so often have I delivered you from the hands of your enemies, but ye have still provoked me more and more, *wherefore I will deliver you no more*: Judg. x. 13. he might have said of us, as he did of the same people, *I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very forward generation, children in whom is no faith*: Deut. xxii. 20. our resolutions and promises of better obedience are not to be trusted; all our righteousness and repentance are but *as the morning cloud, and like the early dew that passeth away*: nay methinks God seems now to say to us, as he did of old to Jerusalem, *be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee, and I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited*. Jer. vi. 8.

We are here met together this day, to pay our solemn acknowledgments to the *GOD of our salvation*; who hath shewed strength with his arm, and hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart: even to him that exerciseth loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth: in him will we glory as our sure refuge and defence, as our mighty deliverer, and the rock of our salvation.

And now I have only to intreat your patience a little longer, whilst I apply what hath been discoursed upon this text a little more closely to the occasion of this day. I may be tedious, but I will not be long.

And blessed be *GOD* for this happy occasion: the greatest England ever had, and, in the true consequences of it, perhaps the greatest that Europe ever had of praise and thanksgiving.

You have heard two sorts of persons described in the text, by very different characters: the one, that glory in their wisdom and might, and riches: the other, that glory in this, that they *understand and know GOD to be the LORD, which exerciseth loving-kindness, and judgment and righteousness in the earth.*

And we have seen these two characters exemplified, or rather drawn to the life, in this present age. We who live in this western part of Christendom have seen a mighty prince, by the just permission of *GOD*, raised up to be a terror and scourge to all his neighbours: a prince, who had in perfection all the advantages mentioned in the former part of the text: and who, in the opinion of many who had been long dazzled with his splendor and greatness, hath passed for many years, for the most politic and powerful, and richest monarch that hath appeared in these parts of the world, for many ages.

Who hath governed his affairs by the deepest and steadiest counsels, and the most refined wisdom of the world: a prince mighty and powerful in his preparation for war; formidable for his vast and well disciplined armies, and for his great naval force: and who had brought the art of war almost to that perfection, as to be able to conquer and do his business without fighting: a mystery hardly known to

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former ages and generations : and all this skill and strength united under one absolute will, not hampered or bound up by any restraints of law or conscience.

A prince that commands the estates of all his subjects, and of all his conquests ; which hath furnished him with an almost inexhaustible treasure and revenue : and one, who if the world doth not greatly mistake him, hath sufficiently gloried in all these advantages, and even beyond the rate of a mortal man.

But not knowing GOD to be the LORD, which exercises loving-kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth ; how hath the pride of all his glory been stained by tyranny and oppression, by injustice and cruelty ; by enlarging his dominions without right, and by making war upon his neighbours without reason, or even colour of provocation ? And this in a more barbarous manner than the most barbarous nations ever did ; carrying fire and desolation wheresoever he went, and laying waste many and great cities without necessity, and without pity.

And now behold what a terrible rebuke the providence of God hath given to this mighty monarch, in the full career of his fortune and fury. The consideration whereof brings to my thoughts those passages in the prophet concerning old Babylon, that standing and perpetual type of the great oppressors and persecutors of God's true church and religion : Isa. xiv. *How is the oppressor ceased ? the exactor of gold ceased ? He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he who ruled the nations in anger is himself persecuted, and none hindreth. The whole earth is at rest and is quiet, and breaks forth into singing : the grave beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming ; it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the captains of the earth ; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations ; all they shall speak and say unto thee, art thou also become weak as we are ? art thou also become like unto us ? How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning ? How art thou cut down to the ground that didst weaken the nations ? For thou*
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hast said in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of GOD: I will sit upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north: that is, upon mount Zion, for just so the psalmist describes it, Psal. xlviii. 2. beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is mount Zion, on the sides of the north. Here the king of Babylon threatens to take Jerusalem, and to demolish the temple where the congregation of Israel met for the worship of the true GOD; I will also sit upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north. Much in the same stile with the threatnings of modern Babylon I will destroy the reformation, I will extirpate the northern heresy.

And then he goes on, I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the most high: yet thou shalt be brought down to the grave, to the sides of the pit: they that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, is this the man that made the earth to tremble that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof, and opened not the house of his prisoners?

GOD seems already to have begun this work, in the late glorious victory at sea; and I hope he will cut it short in *righteousness*. I have sometimes heretofore wondered, why at the destruction of modern and mystical Babylon the scripture should make so express mention of great wailing and lamentation for the loss of her *ships* and *seamen*: little imagining thirty years ago, that any of the kingdoms who had given their power to the *beast*, Rev. xviii. 17. would ever have arrived to that mighty naval force: but the scripture saith nothing in vain.

Whether, and how far, success is an argument of a good cause, I shall not now debate; but thus much, I think, may safely be affirmed, that the providence of GOD doth sometimes, without plain and downright miracles, so visibly shew itself, that we cannot without great stupidity and obstinacy refuse to acknowledge it.

I grant, the cause must first be manifestly just, before success can be made an argument of GOD's favour to

and approbation of it: and if the cause of true religion, and the necessary defence of it against a false and idolatrous worship, be a good cause, ours is so: and I do not here beg the question; we have abundantly proved it to the confusion of our adversaries: if the vindication of the common liberties of mankind against tyranny and oppression, be a good cause, then ours is so: and this needs not to be proved, it is so glaringly evident to all the world. And as our cause is not like theirs, so neither hath their rock been like our rock, our enemies themselves being judges.

And yet as bad an argument as success is of a good cause, I am sorry to say it, but I am afraid it is too true, it is like in the conclusion to prove the best argument of all other to convince those who have so long pretended conscience against submission to the present government.

Mere success is certainly one of the worst arguments in the world of a good cause, and the most improper to satisfy conscience: and yet we find by experience, that in the issue it is the most successful of all other arguments; and does in a very odd, but effectual way, satisfy the consciences of a great many men by shewing them their interest.

GOD has of late visibly made bare his arm in our behalf, though some are still so blind and obstinate that they will not see it: like those of whom the prophet complains, Isa. xxvi. 11. LORD, *when thy hand is lifted up they will not see, but they shall see, and be ashamed for their way at thy people.*

Thus have I represented unto you a mighty monarch, who like a fiery comet hath hung over Europe for many years; and by his malignant influence hath made such terrible havock and devastations in this part of the world.

Let us now turn our view to the other part of the text: and behold a greater than he is here: a prince of a quite different character, who does *understand and know GOD to be the LORD, which doth exercise loving-kindness,*
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and judgment, and righteousness in the earth: and who hath made it the great study and endeavour of his life to imitate these divine perfections, as far as the imperfection of human nature in this mortal state will admit: I say, a greater than he is here; who never said or did an insolent thing, but instead of despising his enemies has upon all occasions encountered them with an undaunted spirit and resolution.

This is the man whom God hath honoured to give a check to this mighty man of the earth, and to put a hook into the nostrils of this great leviathan, who has so long had his pastime in the seas.

But we will not insult, as he once did in a most unprincipely manner over a man much better than himself when he believed him to have been slain at the Boyne, and indeed death came then as near to him as was possible without killing him: but the merciful providence of God was pleased to step in for his preservation, almost by a miracle: for I do not believe that from the first use of great guns to that day, any mortal man ever had his shoulder so kindly kiss'd by a cannon-bullet.

But I will not trespass any further upon that which is the great ornament of all his other virtues; though I have said nothing of him but what all the world does feel and must acknowledge: he is as much above being flattered, as it is beneath an honest and generous mind to be flattered.

Let us then glory in the LORD, and rejoice in the God of our salvation: let us now in the presence of all his people pay our most thankful acknowledgments to him *who is worthy to be praised*; even to the LORD God of Israel, *who alone doth wondrous things*: who giveth victory unto kings, and hath preserved our David his servant from the hurtful sword.

And let us humbly beseech Almighty God, that he would long preserve to us the invaluable blessing of our two excellent princes; whom the providence of God hath sent amongst us, like two good angels; not to rescue two or three persons, but almost a whole nation out of

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Two sovereign princes reigning together, and in the same throne ; and yet so intirely one, as perhaps no nation, no age can furnish us with a parallel ; two princes perfectly united in the same design of promoting the true religion, and the public welfare, by reforming our manners, and as far as is possible, by repairing the breaches, and healing the divisions of a miserably distracted church and nation : in a word, two princes who are contented to sacrifice themselves and their whole time to the care of the publick : and for the sake of that to deny themselves almost all sort of ease and pleasure : To deny themselves, did I say ? No, they have wisely and judiciously chosen the truest and highest pleasure that this world knows, the pleasure of doing good, and being benefactors to mankind. May they have a long and happy reign over us, to make us happy, and to lay up in store for themselves a happiness, without measure, and without end, in GOD'S glorious and everlasting kingdom : for his mercies sake in JESUS CHRIST, to whom with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, both now and for ever. Amen.



S E R M O N XLII.

Against evil-speaking.

Preached before the King and Queen at
White-hall, February 25, 1693-4.

T I T. iii. 2.

To speak evil of no man.

GENERAL persuasives to repentance and a good life, and invectives against sin and wickedness at large, are certainly of good use to recommend religion and virtue, and to expose the deformity and danger of a vicious course. But it must be acknowledged on the other hand, that these general discourses do not so immediately tend to reform the lives of men: because they fall among the crowd, but do not touch the consciences of particular persons, in so sensible and awakening a manner as when we treat of particular duties and sins, and endeavour to put men upon the practice of the one, and to reclaim them from the other, by proper arguments taken from the word of God, and from the nature of particular virtues and vices.

The general way is, as if a physician, instead of applying particular remedies to the distemper of his patient, should entertain him with a long discourse of diseases in general, and of the pleasure and advantages of health, and earnestly persuade him to be well, without taking any particular disease into consideration, and prescribing remedies for it.

But if we would effectually reform men, we must take to task the great and common disorders of their lives, and represent their faults to them in such a manner as may

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convince them of the evil and danger of them, and put them upon the endeavour of a cure.

And to this end I have pitched upon one of the common and reigning vices of the age, calumny and evil-speaking; by which men contract so much guilt to themselves, and create so much trouble to others: And from which, it is to be feared, few or none are wholly free. For *who is he*, saith the son of Sirach, *that hath not offended with his tongue?* Eccles. xix. 16. In many things, saith St. James, *we offend all: and if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.* James iii. 2.

But how few have attained to this perfection? And yet unless we do endeavour after it, and in some good measure attain it, all our pretence to religion is vain: so the same apostle tells us, James i. 26. *If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain.*

For the more distinct handling of this argument, I shall reduce my discourse to these five heads.

First, I shall consider the nature of this vice, and wherein it consists.

Secondly, I shall consider the due extent of this prohibition, *to speak evil of no man.*

Thirdly, I shall shew the evil of this practice, both in the causes and effects of it.

Fourthly, I shall add some further considerations to dissuade men from it.

Fifthly, I shall give some rules and directions for the prevention and cure of it.

I. I shall consider what this sin or vice of evil-speaking, here forbidden by the apostle, is: *μὴ δὲ να βλασφημεῖν*, not to defame and slander any man, not to hurt his reputation, as the etymology of the word doth import. So that this vice consists in saying things of others which tend to their disparagement and reproach, to the taking away or lessening of their reputation and good name. And this, whe-

ther the things said be true or not. If they be false, and we know it, then it is downright calumny; and if we do not know it, but take it upon the report of others, it is however a slander; and so much the more injurious, because really groundless and undeserved.

If the thing be true, and we know it to be so, yet it is a defamation, and tends to the prejudice of our neighbour's reputation: and it is a fault to say the evil of others which is true, unless there be some good reason for it: besides it is contrary to that charity and goodness which Christianity requires, to divulge the faults of others, though they be really guilty of them, without necessity or some other very good reason for it.

Again, it is evil-speaking, and the vice condemned in the text, whether we be the first authors of an ill report, or relate it from others; because the man that is evil-spoken of is equally defamed either way.

Again, whether we speak evil of a man to his face, or behind his back: the former way indeed seems to be the more generous, but yet is a great fault, and that which we call reviling: the latter is more mean and base, and that which we properly call slander or backbiting.

And lastly, whether it be done directly and in express terms, or more obscurely and by way of oblique insinuation; whether by way of downright reproach, or with some crafty preface of condemnation: for so it have the effect to defame, the manner of address does not much alter the case: the one may be more dextrous, but is not one jot less faulty: for many times the deepest wounds are given by these smoother and more artificial ways of slander; as by asking questions, have not you heard of such and so of such a man? I say no more; I only ask the question: or by general intimations, that they are loth to say what they have heard of such a one, are very sorry for it, and do not at all believe it, if you will believe them, and this many times without telling the thing, but leaving you in the dark to suspect the worst.

These and such like arts, though they may seem to be tenderer and gentler ways of using mens reputation, yet in truth they are the most malicious and effectual method

of slander; because they insinuate something that is much worse than is said, and yet are very apt to create in unwary men, a strong belief of something that is very bad, though they know not what it is. So that it matters not in what fashion a slander is dressed up, if it tend to defame a man, and to diminish his reputation, it is the sin forbidden in the text.

II. We will consider the extent of this prohibition, *to speak evil of no man*; and the due bounds and limitations of it. For it is not to be understood absolutely, to forbid us to say any thing concerning others that is bad. This in some cases may be necessary and our duty, and in several cases very fit and reasonable. The question is, in what cases by the general rules of scripture and right reason we are warranted to say the evil of others that is true?

In general, we are not to do this without great reason and necessity; as, for the prevention of some great evil, or the procuring of some considerable good to ourselves, or others. And this I take to be the meaning of that advice of the son of Sirach, Eccles. xix. 8. *whether it be to a friend or a foe, talk not of other mens lives; and if thou canst without offence reveal them not*; that is, if without hurt to any body thou canst conceal them, divulge them not.

But because this may not be direction sufficient, I shall assistance in some of the principal cases, wherein men are warranted to speak evil of others, and yet in so doing do not offend against this prohibition in the text.

First, it is not only lawful, but very commendable, and many times our duty, to do this in order to the probable amendment of the person of whom evil is spoken. In such a case we may tell a man of his faults privately; or where it may not be so fit for us to use that boldness and freedom, we may reveal his faults to one who is more fit and proper to reprove him, and will probably make no other use of this discovery but in order to his amendment. And this is so far from being a breach of charity, that it is one of the best testimonies of it. For perhaps the person may not be guilty of what hath been reported of him,

and then it is a kindness to give him the opportunity of vindicating himself: or if he be guilty, perhaps being privately and prudently told of it he may reform. In this case the son of Sirach adviseth to reveal mens faults; Eccclus xix. 13, 14, 15. *admonish a friend*, says he, *it may be he hath not done it; and if he have done it, that he do it no more: admonish a friend, it may be he hath not said it; and if he have, that he speak it not again: admonish a friend, for many times it is a slander; and believe not every tale.*

But then we must take care that this be done out of kindness, and that nothing of our own passion be mingled with it; and that under pretence of reproving and reforming men, we do not reproach and revile them, and tell them of their faults in such a manner as if we did it to shew our authority rather than our charity. It requires a great deal of address and gentle application so to manage the business of reproof, as not to irritate and exasperate the person whom we reprove, instead of curing him.

Secondly, this likewise is not only lawful, but our duty, when we are legally called to bear witness concerning the fault and crime of another. A good man would not be an accuser, unless the publick good, or the prevention of some great evil should require it. And then the plain reason of the thing will sufficiently justify a voluntary accusation: otherwise it hath always among well-manner'd people been esteemed very odious for a man to be officious in this kind, and a forward informer concerning the misdemeanor of others. Magistrates may sometimes think it fit to give encouragement to such persons, and to set one bad man to catch another, because such men are fittest for such dirty work: but they can never inwardly approve them, nor will they ever make them their friends and confidants.

But when a man is called to give testimony in this kind in obedience to the laws, and out of reverence to the oath taken in such cases, he is so far from deserving blame for so doing, that it would be an unpardonable fault in him to conceal the truth, or any part of it.

Thirdly, it is lawful to publish the faults of others, in our own necessary defence and vindication. When a man cannot conceal another's faults without betraying his own innocency, no charity requires a man to suffer himself to be defamed to save the reputation of another man. *Charity begins at home*; and though a man had never so much goodness, he would first secure his own good name, and then be concerned for other mens. We are to love our neighbours as ourselves; so that the love of ourselves is the rule and measure of our love to our neighbour: and therefore first, otherwise it could not be the rule. And it would be very well for the world, if our charity would rise thus high; and no man would hurt another man's reputation, but where his own is in real danger.

Fourthly, this also is lawful for caution and warning to a third person, that is in danger to be infected by the company, or ill example of another; or may be greatly prejudiced by reposing too much confidence in him, having no knowledge or suspicion of his bad qualities: but even in this case we ought to take great care, that the ill character we give of any man be spread no farther than is necessary to the good end we designed in it.

Besides these more obvious and remarkable cases, this prohibition doth not I think hinder, but that in ordinary conversation men may mention that ill of others, which is already made as publick as it well can be: or that one friend may not in freedom speak to another of the miscarriage of a third person, where he is secure no ill use will be made of it, and that it will go no farther to his prejudice: provided always, that we take no delight in hearing or speaking ill of others: and the less we do it, though without any malice or design of harm, still the better; because this shews that we do not feed upon ill reports, and take pleasure in them.

These are all the usual cases in which it may be necessary for us to speak evil of other men. And these are so evidently reasonable, that the prohibition in the text cannot with reason be extended to them. And if no man would allow himself to say any thing to the prejudice of another man's good name, but in these and the like cases, the

the tongues of men would be very innocent, and the world would be very quiet. I proceed in the

III^d place, to consider the evil of this practice, both in the causes and the consequences of it.

First, we will consider the causes of it. And it commonly springs from one or more of these evil roots.

First, one of the deepest and most common causes of evil-speaking is ill-nature and cruelty of disposition: and by a general mistake ill-nature passeth for wit, as cunning doth for wisdom; though in truth they are nothing akin to one another, but as far distant as vice and virtue.

And there is no greater evidence of the bad temper of mankind, than the general proneness of men to this vice. For (as our SAVIOUR says) *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*. And therefore men do commonly incline to the censorious and uncharitable side: which shews human nature to be strangely distorted from its original rectitude and innocency. The wit of man doth more naturally vent itself in satire and censure, than in praise and panegyrick. When men set themselves to commend, it comes hardly from them, and not without great force and straining; and if any thing be fitly said in that kind, it doth hardly relish with most men: but in the way of invective, the invention of men is a plentiful and never-failing spring: and this kind of wit is not more easy than it is acceptable: it is greedily entertained and greatly applauded, and every man is glad to hear others abused, not considering how soon it may come to his own turn to lie down and make sport for others.

To speak evil of others, is almost become the general entertainment of all companies: and the great and serious business of most meetings and visits, after the necessary ceremonies and compliments are over, is to sit down and backbite all the world. 'Tis the sauce of conversation, and all discourse is counted but flat and dull which hath not something of piquancy and sharpness in it against somebody. For men generally love rather to hear evil of others than good, and are secretly pleased with ill reports and drink them in with greediness and delight: though

at the same time they have so much justice, as to hate those that propagate them; and so much wit, as to conclude that these very persons will do the same for them in another place and company.

But especially, if it concerns one of another party, and that differs from us in matters of religion; in this case, all parties seem to be agreed that they do God great service in blasting the reputation of their adversaries: and though they all pretend to be Christians, and the disciples of him who taught nothing but kindness and meekness and charity; yet it is strange to see with what a salvage and murderous disposition they will fly at one another's reputation and tear it in pieces: and whatever other scruples they may have, they make none to bespatter one another in the most bitter and slanderous manner.

But if they hear any good of their adversaries, with what nicety and caution do they receive it? How many objections do they raise against it? and with what coldness do they at last admit it? It is very well, say they, if it be true. I shall be glad to hear it confirmed. I never heard so much good of him before. You are a good man yourself, but have a care you be not deceived.

Nay it is well, if to balance the matter, and set things even, they do not clap some infirmity and fault into the other scale, that so the enemy may not go off with flying colours.

But on the other side, every man is a good and substantial author of an ill report. I do not apply this to any one sort of men, though all are to blame in this way; *Malicos intra muros peccatur, & extra.* To speak impartially, the zealots of all parties have got a scurvy trick of lying for the truth.

But of all sorts of people, I have observed the priests and bigots of the church of Rome to be the ablest in this way, and to have the strongest faith for a lusty falsehood and calumny. Others will bandy a false report, and toss it from one hand to another; but I never knew any that would so hug a lie and be so very fond of it. They seem

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to be described by St. John in that expression in the revelation, *whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.*

Another shrewd sign that ill-nature lies at the root of this vice is, that we easily forget the good that is said of others, and seldom make mention of it; but the contrary sticks with us, and lies uppermost in our memories, and is ready to come out upon all occasions; and which is yet more ill-natured and unjust, many times when we do not believe it ourselves we tell it to others with this charitable caution, that we hope it is not true; but in the mean time we give it our pass, and venture to take its fortune to be believed or not, according to the charity of those into whose hands it comes.

Secondly, another cause of the commonness of this vice is, that many are so bad themselves, in one kind or other. For to think and speak ill of others is not only a bad thing, but a sign of a bad man. Our blessed SAVIOUR, speaking of the evil of the last days, gives this as the reason of the great decay of charity among men. *Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.* Matth. xxiv. 12. When men are bad themselves they are glad of any opportunity to censure others, and are always apt to suspect that evil of other men which they know by themselves. They cannot have a good opinion of themselves, and therefore are very unwilling to have so of any body else; and for this reason they endeavour to bring men to a level, hoping it will be some justification of them if they can but render others as bad as themselves.

Thirdly, another source of this vice is malice and revenge. When men are in heat and passion they do not consider what is true, but what is spiteful and mischievous: and speak evil of others in revenge of some injury which they have received from them: and when they are blinded by their passions, they lay about them madly and at a venture, not much caring whether the evil they speak be true or not. Nay many are so devilish, as to invent and raise false reports on purpose to blast mens reputation. This is a diabolical temper, and therefore St. James tells us that the slanderous tongue is set on fire of hell: and the

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devil hath his very name from calumny and false accusation; and it is his nature too, for he is always ready to stir up and foment this evil spirit among men: nay, the scripture tell us that he hath the malice and impudence to accuse good men before God; as he did Job, charging him with hypocrisy to God himself; *who*, he knows, *does know the hearts of all the children of men.*

Fourthly, another cause of evil-speaking is envy. Men look with an evil eye upon the good that is in others, and think that their reputation obscures them, and that their commendable qualities do stand in their light; and therefore they do what they can to cast a cloud over them, that the bright shining of their virtues may not scorch them. This makes them greedily to entertain, and industriously to publish any thing that may serve to that purpose, thereby to raise themselves upon the ruins of other mens reputation: and therefore as soon as they have got an ill report of any good man by the end, to work they presently go to send it abroad by the first post: or the string is always ready upon their bow to let fly his arrow with an incredible swiftness, through city and country; for fear the innocent man's justification should overtake it.

Fifthly, another cause of evil-speaking is impertinence and curiosity; an itch of talking and meddling in the affairs of other men, which do no wise concern them. Some persons love to mingle themselves in all business, and are loth to seem ignorant of so important a piece of news as the faults and follies of men, or any bad thing that is talked of in good company. And therefore they do with great care pick up ill stories, as good matter of discourse in the next company that is worthy of them: and this perhaps not out of any great malice, but for want of something better to talk of, and because their parts lie chiefly that way.

Lastly, men do this many times out of wantonness and diversion. So little do light and vain men consider, that a man's reputation is too great and tender a concernment to be jested withal; and that a slanderous tongue is like a serpent, and wounds like a sword. For what

can be more barbarous next to sporting with a man's life than to play with his honour and reputation, which to some men is dearer to them than their lives?

f It is a cruel pleasure which some men take in worrying the reputation of others much better than themselves, and this only to divert themselves and the company. Solomon compares this sort of men to distracted persons. *As a madman, saith he, who casteth fire-brands, arrows and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour the LXX. render it, so is the man that defameth his neighbour, and saith, am I not in sport?* Such, and so bad are the causes of this vice. I proceed to consider in the

Second place, the ordinary, but very pernicious consequences and effects of it; both to others, and to ourselves.

First, to others; the parties I mean that are slandered. To them it is certainly a great injury, and commonly a high provocation, but always matter of no small grief and trouble to them.

It is certainly a great injury, and if the evil which we say of them be not true, it is an injury beyond imagination, and beyond all possible reparation. And though we should do our utmost endeavour afterwards towards their vindication, yet that makes but very little amends because the vindication seldom reacheth so far as the reproach, and because commonly men are neither forward to spread the vindication, nor is it so easily received after ill impressions are once made. The solicitous vindication of a man's self is, at the best, but an after-game; and for the most part a man had better still, than to run the hazard of making the matter worse by playing it.

I will add one thing more, that it is an injury that descends to a man's children and posterity; because the good or ill name of the father is derived down to them, and many times the best thing he hath to leave them is the reputation of his unblemished virtue and worth, and do we make no conscience to rob his innocent children of the best part of this small patrimony, and of

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the kindness that would have been done them for their father's sake, if his reputation had not been so undeservedly stained? Is it no crime by the breath of our mouth at once to blast a man's reputation, and to ruin his children, perhaps to all posterity? Can we make a jest of so serious a matter? Of an injury so very hard to be repented of as it ought, because in such a case no repentance will be acceptable without restitution, if it be in our power. And perhaps it will undo us in this world to make it; and if we do it not, will be our ruin in the other.

I will put the case at the best, that the matter of the slander is true; yet no man's reputation is considerably stained, though never so deservedly, without great harm and damage to him. And it is great odds but the matter by passing through several hands is aggravated beyond truth, every one out of his bounty being apt to add something to it.

But besides the injury, it is commonly a very high provocation. And the consequence of that may be as bad as we can imagine, and may end in dangerous and desperate quarrels. This reason the wise son of Sirach gives why we should defame no man: *Ecclus xix. 8, 9. Whether it be, says he, to a friend or a foe, talk not of other mens lives. For he hath heard and observed thee;* that is, one way or other it will probably come to his knowledge; and *when the time cometh he will shew his hatred;* that is, he will take the first opportunity to revenge it.

At the best, it is always matter of grief to the person that is defamed: and Christianity, which is the best-ordered institution in the world, forbids us the doing of those things whereby we may grieve one another. A man's good name is a tender thing, and a wound there runs deep into the spirit even of a wise and good man: the more innocent any man is in this kind, the more sensible is he of this hard usage; because he never treats others so, nor is he conscious to himself that he hath deserved it.

Secondly, the consequences of this vice are as bad or worse to ourselves. Whoever is wont to speak evil of others, gives a bad character of himself, even to those whom he desires to please; who, if they be wise enough, will conclude that he speaks of them to others, as he does of others to them: and were it not for that fond partiality which men have for themselves, no man could be so blind as not to see this.

And it is very well worthy of our consideration, which our SAVIOUR says in this very case, that *with what measure we mete to others, it shall be measured to us again*; and that many times *heaped up, and running over*. Matth. vii. For there is hardly any thing wherein mankind do use more strict justice and equality, than in rendering evil for evil, and railing for railing.

Nay, revenge often goes further than words. A reproachful and slanderous speech hath cost many a man a duel, and in that the loss of his own life, or the murder of another, perhaps with the loss of his own soul: and I have often wondered that among Christians this matter is no more laid to heart.

And though neither of these great mischiefs should happen to us, yet this may be inconvenient enough many other ways. For no man knows in the chance of things and the mutability of human affairs, whose kindness and good-will he may come to stand in need of before he dies. So that did a man only consult his own safety and quiet, he ought to refrain from evil-speaking. *What man is he saith the psalmist, that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good: keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking falsehood*. Psal. xxxiv. 12, 13.

But there is an infinitely greater danger hanging over us from GOD. If we allow ourselves in this evil practice all our religion is good for nothing. So St. James expressly tells us, *if any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain*. Jam. i. 26. And St. Paul puts slanderers and revilers amongst those that *shall not inherit the kingdom of GOD*. 1 Cor. vi. 10. And our blessed SAVIOUR hath told us, that by our words

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shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned. To which I will add the counsel given us by the wise man, *Refrain your tongue from backbiting, for there is no word so secret that shall go for nought, and the mouth that slandereth slayeth the soul.* Wisdom of Solomon, chap. i. ver. 11. I proceed in the

IVth place, to add some further arguments and considerations to take men off from this vice: as,

First, that the use of speech is a peculiar prerogative of man above other creatures, and bestowed upon him for some excellent end and purpose: that by this faculty we might communicate our thoughts more easily to one another, and consult together for our mutual comfort and benefit: not to enable us to be hurtful and injurious, but helpful and beneficial to one another. The psalmist, as by interpreters is generally thought, calls our *tongue* our *glory*; therewith we *praise God*, and *bless men*. Now to blest is to speak well of any, and to wish them well. So that we pervert the use of speech, and turn our glory into shame, when we abuse this faculty to the injury and reproach of any.

Secondly, consider how cheap a kindness it is to speak well, at least not to speak ill of any body. A good word is an easy obligation, but not to speak ill requires only our silence, which costs us nothing. Some instances of charity are chargeable, as to relieve the wants and necessities of others: the expence deters many from this kind of charity. But were a man never so covetous, he might afford another man his good word; at least he might refrain from speaking ill of him: especially if it be considered how dear many have paid for a slanderous and reproachful word.

Thirdly, consider that no quality doth ordinarily recommend one more to the favour and good-will of men, than to be free from this vice. Every one desires such a man's friendship, and is apt to repose a great trust and confidence in him: and when he is dead, men will praise him; and next to piety towards God, and righteousness to men, nothing is thought a more significant commendation.

tion, than that he was never, or very rarely heard to speak ill of any. It was a singular character of a Roman gentleman, *nescivit quid esset maledicere*, he knew not what it was to give any man an ill word.

Fourthly, let every man lay his hand upon his heart, and consider how himself is apt to be affected with this usage. Speak thy conscience man, and say whether, as bad as thou art, thou wouldst not be glad to have every man's, especially every good man's good word? And to have thy faults concealed, and not to be hardly spoken of, though it may be not altogether without truth, by those whom thou didst never offend by word or deed? But with what face or reason dost thou expect this from others, to whom thy carriage hath been so contrary? Nothing sure is more equal and reasonable than that known rule, *what thou wouldst have no man do to thee, that do thou to no man*.

Fifthly, when you are going to speak reproachfully of others, consider whether you do not lie open to just reproach in the same, or some other kind. Therefore give no occasion, no example of this barbarous usage of one another.

There are very few so innocent and free either from infirmities or greater faults, as not to be obnoxious to reproach upon one account or other; even the wisest, and most virtuous, and most perfect among men have some little vanity, or affectation, which lays them open to the gallery of a mimical and malicious wit: therefore we should often turn our thoughts upon ourselves, and look into that part of the wallet which men commonly sling over their shoulders and keep behind them, that they may not see their own faults: and when we have searched that well, let us remember our SAVIOUR'S rule, *be that is without sin, let him cast the first stone*.

Lastly consider, that it is in many cases as great a charity to conceal the evil you hear and know of others, as if you relieved them in a great necessity. And we think him a hard-hearted man that will not bestow a small alms upon one in great want. It is an excellent advice which the son of Sirach gives to this purpose.

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*Talk not of other mens lives; if thou hast heard a word,
let it die with thee; and be bold it will not burst thee,*
Eccles. xix. 10. I shall in the

With and last place, give some rules and directions for the prevention and cure of this great evil among men.

First, never say any evil of any man, but what you certainly know. Whenever you positively accuse and impute any man of any crime, though it be in private and among friends, speak as you were upon your oath, because God sees and hears you. This not only charity, but justice and regard to truth do demand of us. He that easily credits an ill report is almost as faulty as the first inventor of it. For though you do not make, yet you commonly propagate a lye. Therefore never speak evil of any upon common fame, which for the most part is false, but almost always uncertain whether it be true or not.

Not but that it is a fault, in most cases, to report the evil of men which is true, and which we certainly know to be so: but if I cannot prevail to make men wholly to abstain from this fault, I would be glad to compound with some persons, and to gain this point of them however; because it will retrench nine parts in ten of the evil-speaking that is in the world.

Secondly, before you speak evil of any man consider whether he hath not obliged you by some real kindness, and then it is a bad return to speak ill of him who hath done us good. Consider also, whether you may not come hereafter to be acquainted with him, related to him, or obliged by him, whom you have thus injured? And how will you then be ashamed when you reflect upon it, and perhaps have reason also to believe that he to whom you have done this injury is not ignorant of it?

Consider likewise, whether in the chance of human affairs, you may not some time or other come to stand in need of his favour; and how incapable this carriage of yours towards him will render you of it? And whether it may not be in his power to revenge a spiteful and need-

less word by a shrewd turn? So that if a man made no conscience of hurting others, yet he should in prudence have some consideration of himself.

Thirdly, let us accustom ourselves to pity the faults of men, and to be truly sorry for them, and then we shall take no pleasure in publishing them. And this common humanity requires of us, considering the great infirmities of human nature, and that we ourselves also are liable to be tempted: considering likewise, how severe a punishment every fault and miscarriage is to itself; and how terribly it exposeth a man to the wrath of God, both in this world and the other. He is not a good Christian, that is not heartily sorry for the faults even of his greatest enemies; and if he be so, he will discover them no farther than is necessary to some good end.

Fourthly, whenever we hear any man evil-spoken of, if we know any good of him let us say that. It is always the more humane and the more honourable part to stand up in the defence and vindication of others, than to accuse and bespatter them. Possibly the good you have heard of them may not be true, but it is much more probable that the evil which you have heard of them is not true neither: however, it is better to preserve the credit of a bad man, than to stain the reputation of the innocent. And if there were any need that a man should be evil-spoken of, it is but fair and equal that his good and bad qualities should be mentioned together; otherwise he may be strangely misrepresented, and an indifferent man may be made a monster.

They that will observe nothing in a wise man, but his oversights and follies; nothing in a good man, but his failings and infirmities, may make a shift to render a very wise and good man very despicable. If one should heap together all the passionate speeches, all the froward and imprudent actions of the best man; all that he had said or done amiss in his whole life, and present it all at once in view, concealing his wisdom and virtues; the man in this disguise would look like a mad-man or a fury: and yet if his life were fairly represented, and just in the same manner it was led; and his many and great virtues set over against

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his failings and infirmities, he would appear to all the world to be an admirable and excellent person. But how many and great soever any man's ill qualities are, it is but just that with all this heavy load of faults he should have the due praise of the few real virtues that are in him.

Fifthly, that you may not speak ill of any, do not delight to hear ill of them. Give no countenance to busybodies, and those that love to talk of other mens faults: or if you cannot decently reprove them because of their quality, then divert the discourse some other way; or if you cannot do that, by seeming not to mind it, you may sufficiently signify that you do not like it.

Sixthly, let every man mind himself, and his own duty and concernment. Do but endeavour in good earnest to mend thyself, and it will be work enough for one man, and leave thee but little time to talk of others. When Plato withdrew from the court of Dionysius, who would fain have had a famous philosopher for his flatterer, they parted in some unkindness, and Dionysius bade him not to speak ill of him when he was returned into Greece; Plato told him, *he had no leisure for it*; meaning, that he had better things to mind, than to take up his thoughts and talk with the faults of so bad a man, so notoriously known to all the world.

Lastly, let us set a watch before the door of our lips, and not speak but upon consideration: I do not mean to speak finely, but fitly. Especially when thou speakest of others, consider of whom, and what thou art going to speak: use great caution and circumspection in this matter: look well about thee; on every side of the thing, and on every person in the company, before thy words slip from thee; which when they are once out of thy lips, are for ever out of thy power.

Not that men should be sullen in company, and say nothing; or so stiff in conversation, as to drop nothing but aphorisms and oracles: especially, among equals and friends, we should not be so reserved as if we would have taken for a mighty favour that we vouchsafe to say any thing. If a man had the understanding of an angel, he must

must be contented to abate something of this excess of wisdom, for fear of being thought cunning. The true art of conversation, if any body can hit upon it, seems to be this; an appearing freedom and openness, with a resolute reservedness as little appearing as is possible.

All that I mean by this caution is, that we should consider well what we say, especially of others. And to this end we should endeavour to get our minds furnished with matter of discourse concerning things useful in themselves, and not hurtful to others: and, if we have but a mind wise enough, and good enough, we may easily find a field large enough for innocent conversation; such as will harm no body, and yet be acceptable enough to the better and wiser part of mankind: and why should any one be at the cost of playing the fool to gratify any body whatsoever?

I have done with the five things I propounded to speak to upon this argument. But because hardly any thing can be so clear, but some thing may be said against it; nor any thing so bad, but something may be pleaded in excuse for it: I shall therefore take notice of two or three pleas that may be made for it.

First, some pretend mighty injury and provocation. If in the same kind, it seems thou art sensible of it; and therefore thou of all men oughtest to abstain from it: but in what kind soever it be, the Christian religion forbids revenge. Therefore do not plead one sin in excuse of another, and make revenge an apology for reviling.

Secondly, it is alledged by others, with a little better grace, that if this doctrine were practised, conversation would be spoiled, and there would not be matter enough for pleasant discourse and entertainment.

I answer, the design of this discourse is to redress a great evil in conversation, and that I hope which mends it will not spoil it. And however, if mens tongues lay a little more still, and most of us spake a good deal less than we do, both of ourselves and others, I see no great harm in it: I hope we might for all that live comfortably and in good health, and see many good days. David, I am sure, prescribes it as an excellent receipt, in his op-

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nion, for a quiet, and cheerful, and long life, to refrain from evil-speaking, Psal. xxxiv. 12, 13. *what man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking falsehood.*

But granting that there is some pleasure in invective, I hope there is a great deal more in innocence: and the more any man considers this, the truer he will find it; and whenever we are serious, we ourselves cannot but acknowledge it. When a man examines himself impartially before the sacrament, or is put in mind upon a death-bed to make reparation for injuries done in this kind, he will then certainly be of this mind, and wish he had not done them. For this certainly is one necessary qualification for the blessed sacrament, that we *be in love and charity with our neighbours*; with which temper of mind this quality is utterly inconsistent.

Thirdly, there is yet a more specious plea than either of the former, that men will be encouraged to do ill if they can escape the tongues of men; as they would do, if this doctrine did effectually take place: because by this means one great restraint from doing evil would be taken away, which these good men, who are so bent upon reforming the world, think would be great pity. For many who will venture upon the displeasure of God, will yet abstain from doing bad things for fear of reproach from men: besides, that this seems the most proper punishment of many faults which the laws of men can take no notice of.

Admitting all this to be true, yet it does not seem so good and laudable a way to punish one fault by another: but let no man encourage himself in an evil way with this hope, that he shall escape the censure of men: when I have said all I can, there will, I fear, be evil-speaking enough in the world to chastise them that do ill: and though we should hold our peace, there will be bad tongues enow to reproach men with their evil doings. I wish we could but be persuaded to make the experiment a little while, whether men would not be sufficient-

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ly lashed for their faults, though we sat by and said nothing.

So that there is no need at all that good men should be concerned in this odious work. There will always be offenders and malefactors enow to be executioners to inflict this punishment upon one another. Therefore let no man presume upon impunity on the one hand; and on the other, let no man despair but that this business will be sufficiently done one way or other. I am very much mistaken, if we may not safely trust an ill-natured world that there will be no failure of justice in this kind.

And here, if I durst, I would fain have said a word or two concerning that more publick sort of obloquy by lampoons and libels, so much in fashion in this witty age. But I have no mind to provoke a very terrible sort of men. Yet thus much I hope may be said without offence, that how much soever men are pleased to see others abused in this kind, yet it is always grievous when it comes to their own turn: however I cannot but hope that every man that impartially considers, must own it to be a fault of a very high nature, to revile those whom God hath placed in authority over us, and to slander the *footsteps of the LORD's anointed*: especially since it is expressly written, *thou shalt not speak evil of the rulers of thy people.*

Having represented the great evil of this vice, it might not now be improper to say something to those who suffer by it. Are we guilty of the evil said of us? Let us reform, and cut off all occasions for the future; and turn the malice of our enemies to our own advantage and defeat their ill intentions by making so good an use of it: and then it will be well for us to have been evil-spoken of.

Are we innocent? We may so much the better bear it patiently; imitating herein the pattern of our blessed SAVIOUR, who when he was reviled, reviled not again but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

We may consider likewise, that though it be a misfortune to be evil-spoken of, it is their fault that do

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and not ours ; and therefore should not put us into passion : because another man's being injurious to me is no good reason why I should be uneasy to myself. We should not revenge the injuries done to us, no not upon them that do them, much less upon ourselves. Let no man's provocation make thee lose thy patience. Be not such a fool, as to part with any one virtue, because some men are so malicious as to endeavour to rob thee of the reputation of all the rest. When men speak ill of thee, do as Plato said he would do in that case ; *live so, as that no body may believe them.*

All that now remains is to reflect upon what hath been said, and to urge you and myself to do accordingly. For all is nothing, if we do not practise what we so plainly see to be our duty. Many are so taken up with the deep points and mysteries of religion, that they never think of the common duties and offices of human life. But faith and a good life are so far from clashing with one another, that the Christian religion hath made them inseparable. True faith is necessary in order to a good life, and a good life is the genuine product of a right belief ; and therefore the one never ought to be pressed to the prejudice of the other.

I foresee what will be said, because I have heard it so often said in the like case ; that there is not one word of JESUS CHRIST in all this. No more is there in the text. And yet I hope that JESUS CHRIST is truly preached, whenever his will and laws, and the duties enjoined by the Christian religion, are inculcated upon us.

But some men are pleased to say, that this is morality : I answer, that this is scripture morality, and Christian morality, and who hath any thing to say against that ; I say, I will go yet farther, that no man ought to pretend to believe the Christian religion, who lives in the neglect of so plain a duty ; and in the practice of a sin so clearly condemned by it, as this of evil-speaking is.

But because *the word of GOD is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, yea sharper than calumny*

calumny itself; and pierceth the very hearts and consciences of men, laying us open to ourselves, and convincing us of our more secret as well as our more visible faults; I shall therefore at one view represent to you what is disorderly said concerning this sin in the holy word of GOD.

And I have purposely reserved this to the last, because it is more persuasive and penetrating than any human discourse. And to this end be pleased to consider in what company the Holy Ghost doth usually mention this sin. There is scarce any black catalogue of sins in the bible but we find this among them; in the company of the very worst actions and most irregular passions of men. *Out of the heart*, says our SAVIOUR, Matth. xv. 19. *proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, false-witness, evil-speaking.* And the apostle, Rom. i. 29. ranks backbiters, with fornicators, and murderers, and haters of GOD; and with those of whom it is expressly said, 1 Cor. vi. 10. *that they shall not inherit the kingdom of GOD.*

And when he enumerates the sins of the last times men, says he, 2 Tim. iii. 2, 3. *shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, evil-speakers, without natural affection, perfidious, false accusers, &c.* And which is the strangest of all, they who are said to be guilty of these great vices and enormities are noted by the apostle to be great pretenders to religion; for so it follows in the next words, *having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.* So that it is no new thing for men to make a more than ordinary profession of Christianity, and yet at the same time to live in a most palpable contradiction to the precepts of that holy religion: as if any pretence to mystery, and know not what extraordinary attainments in the knowledge of CHRIST, could exempt men from obedience to his laws, and set them above the virtues of a good life.

And now after all this, do we hardly think that to be a sin, which is in scripture so frequently ranked with murder and adultery and the blackest crimes; such are inconsistent with the life and power of religion, and

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will certainly shut men out of the kingdom of GOD? Do we believe the bible to be the word of GOD? And can we allow ourselves in the common practice of a sin, than which there is hardly any fault of mens lives more frequently mentioned, more severely reprov'd, and more odiously branded in that holy book?

Consider seriously these texts: Psal. xv. 1. *Who shall abide in thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.* Have you never heard what our SAVIOUR says, that of every idle word we must give an account in the day of judgment; that by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned? What can be more severe than that of St. James? *If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is vain.*

To conclude: the sin, which I have now warn'd men against, is plainly condemn'd by the word of GOD; and the duty which I have now been persuading you to, is easy for every man to understand, not hard for any man, that can but resolve to keep a good guard upon himself for some time, by the grace of GOD to practise; and most reasonable for all men, but especially for all Christians, to observe. It is as easy as a resolute silence upon just occasion, as reasonable as prudence and justice and charity, and the preservation of peace and good-will among men, can make it; and of as necessary and indispensable an obligation, as the authority of GOD can render any thing.

Upon all which considerations let every one of us be persuaded to take up David's deliberate resolution, Psal. cxix. 1. *I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not with my tongue,* And I do verily believe, that should we but heartily endeavour to amend this one fault, we should soon be better men in our whole lives: mean, that the correcting of this vice, together with those that are nearly allied to it, and may at the same time, and almost with the same resolution and care be corrected, would make us owners of a great many con-

siderable virtues, and carry us on a good way towards perfection; it being hardly to be imagined that a man that makes conscience of his words should not take an equal or a greater care of his actions. And this I take to be both the true meaning, and the true reason of that saying of St. James, and with which I shall conclude: *If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.*

Now the GOD of peace, who brought again from the dead our LORD JESUS CHRIST, the great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work, to do his will; working in you always that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through JESUS CHRIST, to whom be glory for ever, Amen.



THE
DIVINITY
AND
INCARNATION
OF OUR
Blessed SAVIOUR.

A N
Advertisement
T O T H E
R E A D E R.

*T*HE following sermons were preached several years ago, in the church of St. Lawrence-Jewry in London; and being now revised and enlarged by the author are here made publick: the true reason whereof, was not that which is commonly alledged for printing books, the importunity of friends; but the importunate clamours and malicious calumnies of others, whom the author heartily prays GOD to forgive, and to give them better minds: and to grant that the ensuing discourses, the publication whereof was in so great a degree necessary, may by his blessing prove in some measure useful.

S E R.

S E R M O N XLIII.

C concerning the divinity of our blessed
S A V I O U R.

Preached in the church of St. Lawrence.
Jury, December 30, 1679.

J O H N i. 14.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

TH E S E words contain in them three great points concerning our blessed S A V I O U R, the author and founder of our faith and religion.

First, his incarnation, *the Word was made, or became, flesh.*

Secondly, his life and conversation here among us, *and dwelt among us, ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν*, he pitched his tabernacle among us; he lived here below in this world, and for a time made his residence and abode with us.

Thirdly, that in this state of his humiliation he gave great and clear evidence of his divinity; whilst he appeared as a man and lived amongst us, there were great and glorious testimonies given of him that he was the Son of G O D: and that in so peculiar a manner as no creature can be said to be: *and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, &c.*

I shall begin with the first of these, his incarnation; as most proper for this solemn time, which hath for many ages been set apart for the commemoration of the nativity and incarnation of our blessed S A V I O U R: *the Word was made flesh*, that is, he who is personally called the Word, and whom the evangelist St. John had so full

described in the beginning of this gospel, he became flesh, that is, assumed our nature and became man; for so the word flesh is frequently used in scripture for man or human nature: *O thou that bearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come*, Psal. lxxv. 2. that is, to thee shall all men address their supplications: again, *the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together*, Isa. xl. 5, 6. that is, all men shall behold and acknowledge it; and then it follows, *all flesh is grass*, speaking of the frailty and mortality of man: and so likewise in the new testament, our blessed SAVIOUR foretelling the misery that was coming upon the Jewish nation, says, Matth. xxiv. 22. *except those days should be shortened no flesh should be saved*, that is, no man should escape and survive that great calamity and destruction which was coming upon them: *by the works of the law*, says the apostle, Gal. ii. 16. *shall no flesh, that is, no man, be justified*.

So that by the Word's being made or becoming flesh, the evangelist did not intend that he affirmed only a human body without a soul, and was united only to a human body, which was the heresy of Apollinaris, and his followers, but that he became man, that is, assumed the whole human nature, body and soul. And it is likewise very probable that the evangelist did purposely choose the word flesh, which signifies the frail and mortal part of man, to denote to us that the Son of GOD did assume our nature with all its infirmities, and became subject to the common frailty and mortality of human nature.

The words thus explained contain that *great mystery of godliness*, as the apostle calls it, or of the Christian religion, viz. the incarnation of the Son of GOD, which St. Paul expresseth by the appearance or manifestation of GOD in the flesh, 1 Tim. iii. 16. *and without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, GOD was manifested in the flesh*, that is, he appeared in human nature, he became man; or, as St. John expresseth it in the text, *the Word was made flesh*.

But for the more clear and full explication of these words, we will consider these two things,

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First, the person that is here spoken of, and who is said to be incarnate or to be *made flesh*, namely, *the Word*.

Secondly, the mystery itself, or the nature of this incarnation, so far as the scripture hath revealed and declared it to us.

I. We will consider the person that is here spoken of, and who is said to be incarnate or to be *made flesh*, and who is so frequently in this chapter called by the name or title of the Word; namely the eternal and only begotten Son of GOD; for so we find him described in the text. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, &c.* that is, such as became so great and glorious a person as deserves the title of *the only begotten Son of GOD*.

For the explaining of this name or title of the Word, given by St. John to our blessed SAVIOUR, we will consider these two things.

First, the reason of this name or title of the Word, and what probably might be the occasion why this evangelist insists so much upon it, and makes so frequent mention of it.

Secondly, the description itself, which is given of him under this name or title of the Word by this evangelist, in his entrance into his history of the gospel.

I. We will enquire into the reason of this name or title of the Word, which is here given to our blessed SAVIOUR by this evangelist: and what might probably be the occasion why he insists so much upon it and makes so frequent mention of it. I shall consider these two things distinctly and severally.

First, the reason of this name or title of the Word, here given by the evangelist to our blessed SAVIOUR. And he seems to have done it in compliance with the common way of speaking among the Jews, who frequently call the Messiah by the name of *the Word of the LORD*; of which I might give many instances: but here is one very remarkable, in the Targum of Jonathan,

than, which renders those words of the psalmist, which the Jews acknowledge to be spoken of the Messias, viz. *the LORD said unto my LORD, sit thou on my right hand, &c.* I say it renders them thus, *the LORD said unto his Word, sit thou on my right hand, &c.* And so likewise Philo the Jew calls him by whom GOD made *the world, the Word of GOD, and the Son of GOD.* And Plato probably had the same notion from the Jews, which made Amelius the Platonist, when he read the beginning of St. John's gospel, to say, *this Barbarian agrees with Plato, ranking the Word in the order of principles*; meaning that he made the Word the principle or efficient cause of the world, as Plato also hath done.

And this title of the Word was so famously known to be given to the Messias, that even the enemies of Christianity took notice of it. Julian the apostate calls CHRIST by this name: and Mahomet in his alchoran gives this name of the Word to JESUS the son of Mary. But St. John had probably no reference to Plato, any otherwise than as the Gnosticks, against whom he wrote, made use of several of Plato's words and notions. So that in all probability St. John gives our blessed SAVIOUR this title with regard to the Jews more especially, who anciently called the Messias by this name.

2dly, we will in the next place consider, what might probably be the occasion why this evangelist makes so frequent mention of this title of the Word, and insists so much upon it. And it seems to be this: nay, I think that hardly any doubt can be made of it, since the most ancient of the fathers, who lived nearest the time of St. John, do confirm it to us.

St. John, who survived all the apostles, lived to see those heresies which sprang up in the beginnings of Christianity, during the lives of the apostles, grown up to a great height, to the great prejudice and disturbance of the Christian religion: I mean the heresies of Ebion and Cerinthus, and the several sects of the Gnosticks which began from Simon Magus, and were continued and carried on by Valentinus and Basilides, Carpocrates and Menander: some of which expressly denied the divinity of our

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SAVIOUR, asserting him to have been a mere man, and to have had no manner of existence before he was born of the blessed virgin, as Eusebius and Epiphanius tell us particularly concerning Ebion: which those who hold the same opinion now in our days, may do well to consider from whence it had its original.

Others of them, I still mean the Gnosticks, had corrupted the simplicity of the Christian doctrine, by mingling with it the fancies and conceits of the Jewish cabbalists, and of the schools of Pythagoras and Plato, and of the Chaldean philosophy, more ancient than either; as may be seen in Eusebius *de præparat. evang.* and by jumbling all these together they had framed a confused genealogy of deities, which they called by several glorious names, and all of them by the general name of *Eons* or *Ages*: among which they reckoned *Ζωή*, and *Λόγος*, and *Μονογενής*, and *Πλήρωμα*, that is, the Life, and the Word and the Only begotten, and the Fulness, and many other divine powers and emanations which they fancied to be successively derived from one another.

And they also distinguished between the maker of the world whom they called the God of the old testament, and the God of the new: and between JESUS and CHRIST: JESUS according to the doctrine of Cerinthus, as Irenæus tells us, being the man that was born of the virgin, and CHRIST or the Messiah, being that divine power or Spirit which afterwards descended into JESUS and dwelt in him.

If it were possible, yet it would be to no purpose, to go about to reconcile these wild conceits with one another; and to find out for what reason they were invented, unless it were to amuse the people with these *high swelling words* of vanity, and a pretence of knowledge *falsely so called*, as the apostle speaks in allusion to the name of Gnosticks, that is to say, the men of knowledge, which they proudly assumed to themselves, as if the knowledge of mysteries of a more sublime nature did peculiarly belong to them.

In opposition to all these vain and groundless conceits, St. John in the beginning of his gospel chooseth to speak of our blessed SAVIOUR, the history of whose life and death he was going to write, by the name or title of the Word, a term very famous among those sects: and shews that this Word of GOD, which was also the title the Jews anciently gave to the Messias, did exist before he assumed a human nature, and even from all eternity: and that to this eternal Word did truly belong all those titles which they kept such a canting stir about, and which they did with so much senseless nicety and subtilty distinguish from one another, as if they had been so many several emanations from the deity: and he shews that this Word of GOD was really and truly the life, and the light, and the fulness, and the *only begotten of the Father*: ver. 5. *In him was the life, and the life was the light of men*; and ver. 6. *and the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not*: and ver. 7, 8, 9. where the evangelist speaking of John the Baptist, says of him, *that he came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, and that he was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light: and that light was the true light which coming into the world enlightens every man*: and ver. 14. *and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*: and ver. 16. *And of his fulness we all receive, &c.* You see here is a perpetual allusion to the glorious titles which they gave to their Æons, as if they had been so many several deities.

In short, the evangelist shews that all this fanciful genealogy of divine emanations, with which the Gnosticks made so great a noise, was mere conceit and imagination, and that all these glorious titles did really meet in the Messias who is the Word, and who before his incarnation was from all eternity with GOD, partaker of his divine nature and glory.

I have declared this the more fully and particularly because the knowledge of it seems to me to be the only true key to the interpretation of this discourse of St. John concerning our SAVIOUR under the name and title of

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the Word. And surely it is a quite wrong way for any man to go about by the mere strength and subtilty of his reason and wit, though never so great, to interpret an ancient book, without understanding and considering the historical occasion of it, which is the only thing that can give true light to it.

And this was the great and fatal mistake of Socinus, to go to interpret scripture merely by criticising upon words, and searching into all the senses that they are possibly capable of, till he can find one, though never so forced and foreign, that will save harmless the opinion, which he was before-hand resolved to maintain, even against the most natural and obvious sense of the text which he undertakes to interpret: just as if a man should interpret ancient statutes and records by mere critical skill in words, without regard to the true occasion upon which they were made, and without any manner of knowledge and insight into the history of the age in which they were written.

I shall now proceed to the second thing which I proposed to consider, namely,

II. The description here given of the Word by this evangelist in his entrance into his history of the gospel. *In the beginning, says he, was the Word, and the Word was with GOD, and the Word was GOD: the same was in the beginning with GOD: all things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

In which passage of the evangelist four things are said of the Word which will require a more particular explication.

First, that *he was in the beginning.*

Secondly, that *he was in the beginning with GOD.*

Thirdly, that *he was GOD.*

Fourthly, that *all were made by him.*

1st, That *he was in the beginning*, ἐν ἀρχῇ, which is the same with ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, *from the beginning*, where speaking of CHRIST by the name of eternal life, and of the Word of life, that, says he, *which was from the beginning.*

ginning. Nonnus, the ancient paraphrast of St. John's gospel, by way of explication of what is meant by his being *in the beginning*, adds, that he was ἀρχὸν, without time, that is, before all time; and if so, then he was from all eternity: *in the beginning was the Word*, that is, when things began to be made he was; not then began to be, but then already was, and did exist before any thing was made; and consequently is without beginning, for that which was never made could have no beginning of its being: and so the Jews used to describe eternity, *before the world was*, and *before the foundation of the world*, as also in several places of the new testament. And so likewise Solomon describes the eternity of wisdom, Prov. viii. 22, 23, &c. *The LORD*, says he, *possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old: I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was: when he prepared the heavens I was there; then I was with him as one brought up with him, rejoicing always before him: and so Justin Martyr explains this very expression of St. John, that he was, or had a being before all ages: so likewise Athenagoras, a most ancient Christian writer, GOD, says he, who is an invisible mind, had from the beginning the Word in himself.*

2dly, That *in the beginning the Word was with God* and so Solomon, when he would express the eternity of wisdom, says, *it was with God*: And so likewise the son of Sirach speaking of wisdom, says, it was μετὰ θεῶν, with God: and so the ancient Jews often called the Word of God, the Word which is before the Lord, that is, with him, or in his presence; in like manner the evangelist says here, that the Word was with God, that is, it was always together with him, partaking of his happiness and glory: to which our SAVIOUR refers in his prayer, John xvii. 5. *glorify me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*. And this being with God the evangelist opposeth to his appearing and being manifested to the world, ver. 10. *was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not*; that is, he, who from all eter-

nity was *with* G O D, appeared in the world, and when he did so, though he had made the world, yet the world would not own him. And this opposition between his *being with* G O D and his *being manifested* in the world, the same St. John mentions elsewhere, 1 John i. 2. *I shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.*

3dly, That *he was* G O D: and so Justin Martyr says of him, that *he was* G O D *before the world*, that is, from all eternity: but then the evangelist adds by way of explication, *the same was in the beginning with* G O D, that is, though the Word was truly and really G O D, yet he was not G O D *the Father*, who is the fountain of the deity, but an emanation from him, the only begotten Son of G O D, from all eternity with him; to denote to us, that which is commonly called by divines, and for any thing I could ever see properly enough, the distinction of persons in the deity; at least we know not a fitter word whereby to express that great mystery.

4thly, That *all things were made by him*. This seems to refer to the description which Moses makes of the creation, where G O D is represented creating things by his Word, Gen. i. G O D said, *let there be light, and there was light*: and so likewise the psalmist, Psal. xxxiii. 6. *by the Word of the LORD were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth*: and so St. Peter also expresseth the creation of the world, 2 Pet. iii. 5. *by the Word of the LORD the heavens were of old, and the earth made out of water*: and in the ancient books of the Chaldeans and the verses ascribed to Orpheus, the *maker of the world* is called the Word, and the divine Word: and so Tertullian tells the pagans, that by their philosophers the *maker of the world was called* λόγος, *the Word, or Reason*: and Philo the Jew, following Plato, who himself most probably had it from the Jews, says, that the world was created by the Word; whom he calls the *name of God*, and the *image of God*, and the *Son of God*; two of which glorious titles are ascribed to him, together with that of *maker of the world*, by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews; in

these last days, says he, *GOD hath spoken to us by his Son, by whom also he made the worlds: who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person: and to the same purpose St. Paul speaking of CHRIST, calls him, the image of the invisible GOD, the first-born of every creature; that is, born before any thing was created, as does evidently follow from the reason given in the next words why he called him the first-born of every creature, for by him were all things created that are in heaven and in earth, visible and invisible; all things were created by him and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things subsist. Col. i. 15, 16, 17. From whence it is plain, that by his being the first-born of every creature thus much at least is to be understood, that he was before all creatures, and therefore he himself cannot be a creature, unless he could be before himself: nay the apostle says it expressly in this very text in which he is called the first-born of every creature, or of the whole creation, that he is before all things; that is, he had a being before there was any created being, he was before all creatures both in duration and in dignity; for so must he of necessity be, if all things were made by him; for as the maker is always before the thing which is made, so is he also better and of greater dignity.*

And yet I must acknowledge that there seems to be no small difficulty in the interpretation I have given of this expression, in which CHRIST is said by the apostle to be the first-born of every creature, or of the whole creation because in strictness of speech the first-born is of the same nature with those in respect of whom he is said to be the first-born: and if so, then he must be a creature as well as those in respect of whom he is said to be the first-born. This is the objection in its full strength, and I do own it to have a very plausible appearance: and yet I hope before I have done, to satisfy any one that will consider things impartially and without prejudice, and will duly attend to the scope of the apostle's reasoning in this text, and compare it with other parallel places of the new testament, that it neither is, nor can be the apostle's meaning in affirming CHRIST to be the first-born of every creature.

every creature, to insinuate that the Son of GOD is a creature.

For how can this possibly agree with that which follows and is given as the reason why CHRIST is said to be the *first-born of every creature*? namely, because *all things were made by him*: the apostle's words are these, *the first-born of every creature*, or, of the whole creation, *for by him all things were created*: but now, according to the Socinian interpretation, this would be a reason just the contrary way: for if *all things were created by him*, then he himself is not a creature.

So that the apostle's meaning in this expression must either be that the Son of GOD, our blessed SAVIOUR, was before all creatures, as it is said presently after that *he is before all things*; and then the reason which is added will be very proper and pertinent, *he is before all things*, because *all things were created by him*: in which sense it is very probable that the Son of GOD elsewhere calls himself, Rev. iii. 14. *the beginning of the creation of GOD*, meaning by it, as the philosophers most frequently use the word ἀρχή, the principle or efficient cause of the creation: and so we find the same word, which our translation renders the beginning, used together with the word first-born, as if they were of the same importance; *the beginning and first-born from the dead*, Col. i. 18. that is, the principle and efficient cause of the resurrection of the dead.

Or else, which seems to me to be the most probable, and indeed the true meaning of the expression, by this title of *the first-born of every creature*, the apostle means, that he was lord and heir of the creation: for the first-born is natural heir, and Justinian tells us, that heir did anciently signify lord: and therefore the scripture uses these terms promiscuously, and as if they were equivalent; for whereas St. Peter says of JESUS CHRIST, that *he is lord of all*, Acts x. 36. St. Paul calls him, Rom. iv. 13. *heir of all things*: and then the reason given by the apostle why he calls him *the first-born of every creature* will be very fit and proper, because *all things were created by him*: for well may he be said to be

lord and heir of the creation who *made all things that were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made.*

And this will yet appear much more evident, if we consider, that the apostle to the Hebrews, (who, by several of the ancients, was thought to be St. Paul, where he gives to CHRIST some of the very same titles which St. Paul in his epistle to the Colossians had done, calling him, the *image of God*, and the *maker of the world*,) does, instead of the title of the *first-born of every creature*, call him the *heir of all things*; and then adds, as the reason of this title, that by him God made the worlds, God, says he, *bath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath constituted heir of all things who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the Word of his power, &c.* Which is exactly parallel with that passage of St. Paul to the Colossians, where CHRIST is called *the image of the invisible God*, and where it is likewise said of him, that *he made all things, and that by him all things do subsist*, which the apostle to the Hebrews, in different words, but to the very same sense, expresseth by *his upholding all things by the Word of his power*, that by the same powerful Word by which all things at first were made: but then instead of calling him *the first-born of every creature*, because *all things were made by him*, he calls him the *heir of all things, by whom God also made the worlds.*

And indeed that expression of *the first-born of every creature* cannot admit of any other sense which will agree so well with the reason that follows as the sense which we have mentioned; namely, that he is therefore *heir of the whole creation*, because *all creatures were made by him*; which exactly answers those words of the apostle to the Hebrews, *whom he hath constituted heir of all things by whom also he made the worlds.*

And now I appeal to any sober and considerate man whether the interpretation which I have given of the expression of the *first-born of every creature*, be not more agreeable both to the tenour of the scripture, and

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the plain scope and design of the apostle's argument and reasoning in that text.

I have insisted the longer upon this, because it is the great text upon which the Arians lay the main strength and stress of their opinion that the Son of GOD is a creature, because he is said by the apostle to be the *first-born of every creature*; by which expression, if no more be meant than that he is heir and lord of the whole creation, which I have shewed to be very agreeable both to the use of the word first-born among the Hebrews, and likewise to the description given of CHRIST in that parallel text which I cited out of the epistle to the Hebrews, then this expression of *the first-born of every creature* is nothing at all to the purpose either of the Arians or the Socinians, to prove the Son of GOD to be a creature: besides, that the interpretation which I have given of it makes the apostle's sense much more current and easy; for then the text will run thus, *who is the image of the invisible GOD, heir and lord of the whole creation, for by him all things were made.*

So that in these four expressions of the evangelist which I have explained, there are these four things distinctly affirmed of the Word.

First, that *he was in the beginning*, that is, that he already was and did exist when things began to be created: he was before any thing was made, and consequently is without any beginning of time; for that which was never made could have no beginning of its being.

Secondly, that in that state of his existence before the creation of the world he was partaker of the divine glory and happiness. And this I have shewed to be the meaning of that expression, *and the Word was with GOD*: for thus our blessed SAVIOUR does explain his being with God before the world was, *and now, O Father, glorify me with thy own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

Thirdly, that *he was GOD*; and the Word was GOD.

Not GOD the Father, who is the principle and fountain

tain of the deity: to prevent that mistake, after he had said that *the Word was God*, he immediately adds in the next verse, *the same was in the beginning with God*: he was *GOD* by participation of the divine nature and happiness together with the Father, and by way of derivation from him, as the light is from the sun: which is the common illustration which the ancient fathers of the Christian church give us of this mystery, and is perhaps the best and fittest that can be given of it. For among finite beings it is not to be expected, because not possible, to find any exact resemblance of that which is infinite, and consequently incomprehensible; because whatever is infinite is for that reason incomprehensible by a finite understanding, which is too short and shallow to measure that which is infinite; and whoever attempts it will soon find himself out of depth.

Fourthly, that *all things were made by him*: which could not have been more emphatically expressed than it is here by the evangelist, after the manner of the Hebrews, who when they would say a thing with the greatest force and certainty, are wont to express it both affirmatively and negatively; as, *he shall live and not die*, that is, he shall most assuredly live: so here, *all things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made*, that is, he made all creatures without exception, and consequently he himself is not a creature, because it is evidently impossible that any thing should ever make itself: but then if he be, and yet was never made, it is certainly true that he always was, even from all eternity.

All these assertions are plainly and expressly contained in this description which the evangelist St. John here makes of the Word; and this according to the interpretation of these expressions by the unanimous consent of the most ancient writers of the Christian church; who, some of them, had the advantage of receiving it from the immediate disciples of St. John: which surely is no small prejudice against any newly invented and contrary interpretation; as I shall hereafter more fully shew, when

I come to consider the strange and extravagant interpretation which the Socinians make of this passage of St. John; which is plain enough of itself, if they, under a pretence of explaining and making it more clear, had not disturbed and darkened it.

Now from this description, which the evangelist here gives of the Word, and which I have so largely explained in the foregoing discourse, these three corollaries or conclusions do necessarily follow.

First, that the Word here described by St. John is not a creature. This conclusion is directly against the Arians, who affirmed that the Son of GOD was a creature. They grant indeed that he is the first of all the creatures both in dignity and duration; for so they understand that expression of the apostle wherein he is called *the first-born of every creature*: but this I have endeavoured already to shew not to be the meaning of that expression.

They grant him indeed to have been GOD's agent or instrument in the creation of the world, and that all other creatures besides himself were made by him: but still they contend that he is a creature and was made: Now this cannot possibly consist with what St. John says of him, that *he was in the beginning*, that is, as hath been already shewn, before any thing was made: and likewise, because he is said to have *made all things*, and *that without him was not any thing made that was made*; and therefore he himself who made all things is necessarily excepted out of the condition or rank of a creature; as the apostle reasons in another case, *he hath put all things under his feet*: but *when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted who did put all things under him*: in like manner, *if by him all things were made, and without him was not any thing made that was made*, then either he was not made, or he must make himself, which involves in it a plain contradiction.

Secondly, that this Word was from all eternity: for if *he was in the beginning*, that is, before any thing was made, he must of necessity always have been; because whatever is, must either have been some time made, or
must

must always have been; for that which was not, and afterwards is, must be made. And this will likewise follow from his being said to be GOD, and that in the most strict and proper sense, which doth necessarily imply his eternity, because GOD cannot begin to be, but must of necessity always have been.

Thirdly, from both these it will undeniably follow, that he had an existence before his incarnation, and his being born of the blessed virgin. For *if he was in the beginning*, that is, from all eternity, which I have shewn to be the meaning of that expression, then certainly he was before his being born of the blessed virgin. And this likewise is implied in the proposition in the text, *and the Word was made flesh*, viz. that Word which the evangelist had before so gloriously described, that Word which *was in the beginning, and was with GOD, and was GOD, and by whom all things were made*; I say, that Word was incarnate and assumed a human nature, and therefore must necessarily exist and have a being before he could assume humanity into an union with his divinity.

And this proposition is directly levelled against the Socinians, who affirm our blessed SAVIOUR to be a mere man, and that he had no existence before he was born of the virgin Mary his mother: which assertion of theirs doth perfectly contradict all the former conclusions which have been drawn from the description here given by St. John of the Word: and their interpretation of this passage of St. John, applying it to the beginning of the publication of the gospel, and to the new creation or reformation of the world by JESUS CHRIST, doth likewise contradict the interpretation of this passage constantly received, not only by the ancient fathers, but even by the general consent of all Christians for fifteen hundred years together, as I shall hereafter plainly shew: for to establish this their opinion, that our blessed SAVIOUR was a mere man, and had no existence before his birth, they are forced to interpret this whole passage in the beginning of St. John's gospel quite to another sense, never mentioned, nor I believe thought of by any Christian

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writer whatsoever before Socinus: and it is not easy to imagine how any opinion can be loaded with a greater and heavier prejudice than this is.

And this I should now take into consideration, and shew, besides the novelty of this interpretation, and the great violence and unreasonableness of it, the utter inconsistency of it with other plain texts of the new testament.

But this is wholly matter of controversy, and will require a large discourse by itself: I shall therefore wave the further prosecution of it at present, and apply myself to that which is more practical and proper for the occasion of this season: so that at present I have done with the first thing contained in the first part of the text, viz. The person here spoken of, who is said to be incarnate, namely the Word, it was *he that was made flesh*.

I should then have proceeded to the second thing which I proposed to consider, viz. The mystery itself, or the nature of this incarnation so far as the scripture hath revealed and declared it to us, namely, by assuming our nature in such a manner as that the divinity became united to a human soul and body. But this I have already endeavoured in some measure to explain, and shall do it more fully in some of the following discourses upon this text. I shall now only make a short and useful reflection upon it with relation to the solemnity of this time.

And it shall be to stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of the great love of God to mankind in the mystery of our redemption by the incarnation of the Word, *the only begotten son of God*: that he should deign to have such a regard to us in our low condition, and to take our case so much to heart as to think of redeeming and saving mankind from that depth of misery into which we had plunged ourselves; and to do this in so wonderful and astonishing a manner: that God should employ his eternal and only begotten Son, who had been with him from all eternity, partaker of his happiness and glory, and was *God of God*, to save the sons

sons of men by so infinite and amazing a condescension : that GOD should vouchsafe to become man, to reconcile man to GOD : that he should come down from heaven to earth, to raise us from earth to heaven : that he should assume our vile and frail and mortal nature, that he might clothe us with glory and honour and immortality : that he should suffer death to save us from hell, and shed his blood to purchase eternal redemption for us.

For certainly the greater the person is that was employed in this merciful design, so much the greater is the condescension, and the love and goodness expressed in it so much the more admirable : that the Son of GOD should stoop from the height of glory and happiness to the lowest degree of abasement, and to the very depth of misery for our sakes, who were so mean and inconsiderable, so guilty and obnoxious to the severity of his justice, so altogether unworthy of his grace and favour, and so very unwilling to receive it when it was so freely offered to us ; for, as the evangelist here tells us, *he came to his own, and his own received him not* : to his own creatures, and they did not own and acknowledge their maker ; to his own nation and kindred, and they despised him and esteemed him not. Lord ! what is man, that GOD should be so mindful of him ; or the son of man, that the Son of GOD should come down from heaven to visit him, in so much humanity and condescension, and with so much kindness and compassion ?

Blessed GOD and SAVIOUR of mankind ! what shall we render to thee for such mighty love, for such inestimable benefits as thou hast purchased for us, and art ready to confer upon us ? What shall we say to thee, O thou preserver and lover of souls, so often as we approach thy holy table, there to commemorate this mighty love of thine to us, and to partake of those invaluable blessings which by thy precious bloodshedding thou hast obtained for us ? so often as we there remember, that thou wast pleased to assume our mortal nature, on purpose to live amongst us for our instruction, and for our example, and to lay down thy life for the redemption

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of our souls, and for the expiation of our sins; and to *take part of flesh and blood* that thou mightest shed it for our sakes: what affections should these thoughts raise in us? What vows and resolutions should they engage us in, of perpetual love, and gratitude, and obedience to thee the most gracious and most glorious redeemer of mankind?

And with what religious solemnity should we, more especially at this time, celebrate the incarnation and birth of the Son of GOD, by giving praise and *glory to GOD in the highest*, and by all possible demonstration of charity and good-will to men? And as he was pleased to assume our nature, so should we, especially at this season, *put on the LORD JESUS CHRIST*, that is, sincerely embrace and practise his religion, *making no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*: and now that the *sun of righteousness* is risen upon the world, we should *walk as children of the light*, and *demean ourselves decently as in the day*, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envy: and should be very careful not to abuse ourselves by sin and sensuality, upon this very consideration, that the Son hath put such an honour and dignity upon us: we should reverence that nature which GOD did not disdain to assume and to inhabit here on earth, and in which he now gloriously reigns in heaven at the right hand of his Father; *to him be glory for ever and ever.* Amen.



S E R M O N XLIV.

Concerning the divinity of our blessed
S A V I O U R.

Preached in the church of St. Lawrence
Jury, January 6, 1679.

JOHN i. 14.

The Word was made flesh.

I Proceed now to prosecute the third corollary or conclusion which does necessarily follow from the description which St. John in the beginning of his gospel gives of the Word, and which I have largely explained in the foregoing discourse: and was this,

That the Word, here described by the evangelist, had an existence before his incarnation, and his being born of the blessed virgin.

This assertion, I told you, is levelled directly against the Socinians, who affirm our blessed S A V I O U R to be a mere man, and deny that he had any existence before he was born of the virgin Mary his mother: which position of theirs does perfectly contradict all the former conclusions which have been so evidently drawn from the description here given of the Word: and not only so, but hath forced them to interpret this whole passage in the beginning of St. John's gospel in a very different sense from that which was constantly received, not only by the ancient fathers, but by the general consent of all Christians 1500 years together: for to establish this their opinion of our S A V I O U R's being a mere man, and having no existence before his birth, they have found it necessary

expound this whole passage quite to another sense, and such as by their own confession was never mentioned, nor, I believe, thought of by any Christian writer whatsoever before Socinus.

For this reason I shall very particularly consider the interpretation which Socinus gives of this passage of St. John; and besides the novelty of it, which they themselves acknowledge, I make no doubt very plainly to manifest the great violence and unreasonableness, and likewise the inconsistency of it with other plain texts of the new testament.

It is very evident what it was that forced Socinus to so strained and violent an interpretation of this passage of the evangelist, namely, that he plainly saw how much the obvious, and natural, and generally received interpretation of this passage, in all ages of the Christian church down to his time, stood in the way of his opinion, of CHRIST's being a mere man, which he was so fond of, and must of necessity have quitted, unless he would either have denied the divine authority of St. John's gospel, or else could supplant the common interpretation of this passage by putting a quite different sense upon it: which sense he could find no way to support without such pitiful and wretched shifts, such precarious and arbitrary suppositions, as a man of so sharp a reason and judgment as Socinus, could not, I thought, have ever been driven to. But necessity hath no laws either of reason or modesty; and he who is resolved to maintain an opinion which he hath once taken up, must stick at nothing, but must break through all difficulties that stand in his way: and so the Socinians have here done, as will, I hope, manifestly appear in the following discourse.

They grant, that by the Word is here meant CHRIST, by whom God spake and declared his mind and will to the world; which they make to be the whole reason of that name or title of the Word which is here given him, and not because by him God made the world: for the Word by which God made the world, they tell us, was nothing but the powerful command of God, and not a person who was designed to be the Messiah. And because,

as I have shewed before, the ancient Jews do make frequent mention of this title of the *Word of God*, by whom they say *God made the World*, and do likewise apply this title to the *Messias*; therefore to avoid this, Schlictingius says, that the Chaldee paraphraists, Jonathan and Onkelos, do sometimes put the *Word of God* for *God*, by a metonymy of the effect for the cause; but then he confidently denies that they do any where distinguish the *Word of God* from the person of *God*, as they acknowledge that St. John here does; nor do they, says he, understand by the *Word of God* the *Messias*, but on the contrary do oppose the *Word of God* to the *Messias*: all which is most evidently confuted by that passage which I cited before out of the targum of Jonathan, who renders those words concerning the *Messias*, *the LORD said unto my LORD, &c.* thus, *the LORD said unto his Word, sit thou on my right hand, &c.* where you see both that the *Word of God* is plainly distinguished from *God*, and that it is the Title given to the *Messias*; which are the two things which Schlictingius doth so confidently deny.

This then being agreed on all hands, that by the *Word* St. John means the *Messias*, I shall in the next place shew by what strained and forced arts of interpretation the Socinians endeavour to avoid the plain and necessary consequence from this passage of St. John, namely, that the *Word* had an existence before he was made flesh, and born of the blessed virgin his mother.

This then, in short, is the interpretation which they give of this passage, than which I think nothing can be more unnatural and violent.

In the beginning: this they will by no means have to refer to the creation of the world, but to the beginning of the gospel; that is, when the gospel first began to be published; then was *CHRIST*, and not before: *and was with God*, that is, says Socinus, *CHRIST* as *was the Word of God*, that is, the gospel of *CHRIST* which was afterwards by him revealed to the world, was first only known to *God*: but all this being somewhat hard, first to understand by *the beginning* not the be-

ning of the world but of the gospel; and then by the Word which *was with GOD*, to understand the gospel which before it was revealed was only known to GOD; they have upon second thoughts found out another meaning of those words, *and the Word was with GOD*; that is, saith Schlictingius, CHRIST was taken up by GOD into heaven, and there instructed in the mind and will of GOD, and from thence sent down into the world again to declare it to mankind.

And the Word was GOD, that is, they say, CHRIST had the honour and title of GOD conferred upon him, as magistrates also have, who in the scripture are called gods: *he was GOD*, not by nature but by office, and by divine constitution and appointment.

All things were made by him: this they will needs have to be meant of the renovation and reformation of the world by JESUS CHRIST, which is several times in scripture called a new creation.

This in short is the sum of their interpretation of this passage, which I shall now examine, and to which I shall oppose three things as so many invincible prejudices against it.

First, That not only all the ancient fathers of the Christian church, but so far as I can find, all interpreters whatsoever for fifteen hundred years together, did understand this passage of St. John in a quite different sense, namely, of the creation of the material, and not of the renovation of the moral world: and I add farther, that the generality of Christians did so understand this passage, as to collect from it, as an undoubted point of Christianity, that the Word had a real existence before he was born of the blessed virgin.

And thus not only the orthodox Christians, but even the Arians, and Amelius the Platonist, who was a more indifferent judge than either of them, did understand this passage of St. John, without any thought of this invention that he spake not of the old, but of the new creation of the world by JESUS CHRIST, and the reformation of mankind by the preaching of the gospel: which I dare say no indifferent reader of St. John, that had not been

prepossessed and biaſſed by ſome violent prejudice, would ever have thought of.

And ſurely it ought to be very conſiderable in this caſe, that the moſt ancient Chriſtian writers, Ignatius, Juſtin Martyr, Athenagoras, Irenæus, Tertullian, and even Origen himſelf, who is called the father of interpreters, are moſt expreſs and poſitive in this matter. For Ignatius was the ſcholar of Polycarp, who was a diſciple of St. John; and Juſtin Martyr lived in the next age to that of the apoſtles; and Origen was a man of infinite learning and reading, and in his comments upon ſcripture ſeems to have conſidered all the interpretations of thoſe that were before him. So that if this, which Socinus is ſo confident is the true ſenſe of St. John, had been any where extant, he would not probably have omitted it; nay rather would certainly have mentioned it, if for no other reaſon, yet for the ſurpriſing novelty and ſtrangenefs of it, with which he was apt to be over-much delighted.

So that if this interpretation of Socinus be true, here are two things very wonderful, and almoſt incredible: firſt, that thoſe who lived ſo very near St. John's time, and were moſt likely to know his meaning, as Ignatius, Juſtin Martyr, &c. ſhould ſo widely miſtake it: and then, that the whole Chriſtian world ſhould for ſo many ages together be deceived in the ground and foundation of ſo important an article of faith, if it were true; or if it were not, ſhould be led into ſo groſs and dangerous an error as this muſt needs be, if CHRIST had no real exiſtence before he was born into the world: and which would be neceſſarily conſequent upon this, that no man did underſtand this paſſage of St. John aright before Socinus. This very conſideration alone, if there were no other, were ſufficient to ſtagger any prudent man's belief of this interpretation.

As to the novelty of it, Socinus himſelf makes no difficulty to own it; nay, he ſeems rather to rejoice and to applaud himſelf in it. Unhappy man! that was ſo wedded to his own opinion, that no objection, no difficulty could divorce him from it.

And for this I refer myself to his preface to his explanation of this first chapter of St. John's gospel; where you shall find these words concerning the passage now in controversy, *quorum verus sensus omnes prorsus, qui quidem extarent, explanatores latuisse videtur, the true sense of which words, says he, seems to have been hid from all the expositors that ever were extant.* And upon these words, ver. 10. *He was in the world, and the world was made by him,* he hath this expression, *quid autem hoc loco sibi velit Johannes, à nemine quod sciam adhuc rectè expostum fuit, but what St. John means in this place was never yet, that I know of, by any man righty explained:* and Schlichtingius after him, with more confidence but much less decency, tells us, that concerning the meaning of those expressions, *in the beginning,* and of those which follow concerning the Word, the ancient interpreters did *ab apostoli mente delirare, went so far from the apostle's meaning as if they had rav'd and been out of their wits:* which is so extravagantly said, and with so much contempt of those great and venerable names, who were the chief propagators of Christianity in the world, and to whom all ages do so justly pay a reverence, that nothing can be said in excuse of him, but only that it is not usual with him to fall into such rash and rude expressions. But the man was really pinched by so plain and pressing a text, and where reason is weak and blunt, passion must be whetted, the only weapon that is left when reason fails: and I always take it for granted, that no man is ever angry with his adversary, but for want of a better argument to support his cause.

And yet to do right to the writers on that side, I must own, that generally they are a pattern of the fair way of disputing, and of debating matters of religion without heat and unseemly reflections upon their adversaries, in the number of whom I did not expect that the primitive fathers of the Christian church would have been reckoned by them. They generally argue matters with that temper and gravity, and with that freedom from passion and transport, which becomes a serious and weighty argument: and for the most part they reason closely and

clearly,

clearly, with extraordinary guard and caution, with great dexterity and decency, and yet with smartness and subtilty enough; with a very gentle heat, and few hard words: virtues to be praised where-ever they are found, yea even in an enemy, and very worthy our imitation: in a word, they are the strongest managers of a weak cause and which is ill founded at the bottom, that perhaps ever yet meddled with controversy: insomuch that some of the protestants and the generality of the popish writers, and even of the Jesuits themselves, who pretend to all the reason and subtilty in the world, are in comparison of them but mere scolds and bunglers. Upon the whole matter, they have but this one great defect, that they want a good cause and truth on their side; which if they had, they have reason, and wit, and temper enough to defend it.

But to return to the business. That which I urge them withal, and that from their own confession, is this, that this interpretation of theirs is perfectly new, and unknown to the whole Christian world before Socinus; and for that reason, in my opinion, not to be bragged of: because it is in effect to say that the Christian religion, in a point pretended on both sides to be of the greatest moment, was never rightly understood by any since the apostles days, for fifteen hundred years together: and which makes the matter yet worse, that the religion which was particularly designed to overthrow polytheism and the belief of more gods, hath, according to them, been so ill taught and understood by Christians for so many ages together, and almost from the very beginning of Christianity, as does necessarily infer a plurality of gods: an inconvenience so great, as no cause, how plausible soever it may otherwise appear, is able to stand under and to sustain the weight of it.

For this the Socinians object to us at every turn, as the unavoidable consequence of our interpretation of this passage of St. John, and of all other texts of scripture produced by us to the same purpose, notwithstanding that this interpretation hath obtained in the Christian church for so many ages. Now whosoever can believe that the
Christian

Christian religion hath done the work for which it was principally designed so ineffectually, must have very little reverence for it; nay, it must be a marvellous civility in him if he believe it at all. All that can be said in this case is, that it pleases God many times to permit men to hold very inconsistent things, and which do in truth, though they themselves discern it not, most effectually overthrow one another.

Secondly, another mighty prejudice against this interpretation is this, that according to this rate of liberty in interpreting scripture, it will signify very little or nothing, when any person or party is concerned to oppose any doctrine contained in it; and the plainest texts for any article of faith, how fundamental and necessary soever, may by the same arts and ways of interpretation be eluded and rendered utterly ineffectual for the establishing of it. For example: if any man had a mind to call in question that article of the creed concerning the creation of the world, why might he not, according to Socinus his way of interpreting St. John, understand the first chapter of Genesis concerning the beginning of the mosaical dispensation, and interpret the creation of the heaven and the earth to be the institution of the Jewish polity and religion, as by the new heavens and the new earth they pretend is to be understood the new state of things under the gospel? And why may not the chaos signify that state of darkness and ignorance, in which the world was before the giving of the law by Moses? And so on; as a very learned divine * of our own hath ingeniously shewn more at large.

There is no end of wit and fancy, which can turn any thing any way, and can make whatever they please to be the meaning of any book, though never so contrary to the plain design of it, and to that sense which at the first hearing and reading of it is obvious to every man of common sense.

And this, in my opinion, Socinus hath done in the case now before us, by imposing a new and odd and violent

• Dr. Stillingfleet, late bishop of Worcester.

sense

sense upon this passage of St. John, directly contrary to what any man would imagine to be the plain and obvious meaning of it, and contrary likewise to the sense of the Christian church in all ages down to his time ; who yet had as great or greater advantages of understanding St. John aright, and as much integrity as any man can now modestly pretend to : and all this only to serve and support an opinion which he had entertained before, and therefore was resolved one way or other to bring the scripture to comply with it : and if he could not have done it, it is greatly to be feared that he would at last have called in question the divine authority of St. John's gospel, rather than have quitted his opinion.

And to speak freely, I must needs say that it seems to me a much fairer way to reject the divine authority of a book, than to use it so disingenuously, and to wrest the plain expressions of it with so much straining and violence from their most natural and obvious sense : for no doctrine whatsoever can have any certain foundation in any book, if this liberty be once admitted, without regard to the plain scope and occasion of it, to play upon the words and phrases with all the arts of criticism, and with all the variety of allegory, which a brisk and lively imagination can devise : which I am so far from admiring in the expounding of the holy scriptures, that I am always jealous of an over-laboured and far-fetched interpretation of any author whatsoever.

I do readily grant, that the Socinian writers have managed the cause of the reformation against the innovations and corruptions of the church of Rome both in doctrine and practice, with great acuteness and advantage in many respects : but I am sorry to have cause to say, that they have likewise put into their hands better and sharper weapons than ever they had before for the weakning and undermining of the authority of the holy scriptures ; which Socinus indeed hath in the general strongly asserted, had he not by a dangerous liberty of imposing a foreign and forced sense upon particular texts brought the whole into uncertainty.

Thirdly, which is as considerable a prejudice against this new interpretation of this passage of St. John as either of the former, I shall endeavour to shew, that this point, of the existence of the Word before his incarnation, does not rely only upon this single passage of St. John, but is likewise confirmed by many other texts of the new testament conspiring in the same sense, and utterly incapable of the interpretation which Socinus gives of it.

I find he would be glad to have it taken for granted, that this is the only text in the new testament to this purpose: and therefore he says very cunningly, that this doctrine of the existence of the Son of God before his incarnation is too great a doctrine to be established upon one single text. And this is something, if it were true, that there is no other text in the new testament that does plainly deliver the same sense: and yet this were not sufficient to bring in question the doctrine delivered in this passage of St. John.

That God is a *spirit*, will I hope be acknowledged to be a very weighty and fundamental point of religion; and yet I am very much mistaken, if there be any more than one text in the whole bible that says so, and that text is only in St. John's gospel. I know it may be said, that from the light of natural reason it may be sufficiently proved that God is a spirit: but surely Socinus, of all men, cannot say this with a good grace; because he denies that the existence of a God can be known by natural light without divine revelation: and if it cannot be known by natural light that there is a God, much less can it be known by natural light what God is, whether a spirit or a body.

And yet after all it is very far from being true, that there is but one text to this purpose; which yet he thought fit to insinuate, by way of excuse, for the novelty and boldness of his interpretation; of which any one that reads him may see that he was sufficiently conscious to himself, and therefore was so wise as to endeavour, by this sly insinuation, to provide and lay in against it. I have likewise another reason which very much inclines me to believe that Socinus was the first author of this interpretation,

tion, because it seems to me next to impossible, that a man, of so good an understanding as he was, could ever have been so fond of so ill-favoured a child if it had not been his own. And yet I do not at all wonder that his followers came into it so readily, since they had him in so great a veneration, it being natural to all sects to admire their master; besides that, I doubt not but they were very glad to have so great an authority as they thought him to be, to vouch for an interpretation which was so seasonably devised for the relief of their cause, in so much danger to be overthrown by a text that was so plain and full against them.

And how little ground there is for this insinuation, that this is the only text in the New Testament to this purpose, I shall now shew from a multitude of other texts, to the same sense and purpose with this passage of St. John. And I shall rank them under two heads.

First, those which expressly assert the Son of God to have been, and to have been in heaven with God, and partaker with him in his glory, before his incarnation and appearance in the world.

Secondly, Those which affirm that the world and all creatures whatsoever were made by him.

I. Those texts which expressly assert the Son of God to have been, and to have been in heaven with God, and partaker with him in his glory, before his incarnation and appearance in the world.

No man hath ascended into heaven, but he that came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven: John iii. 13. where the Son is said to have come down from heaven, in respect of the union of his divinity with human nature, and his special residence in it here below: and yet he is said so to have come down from heaven as still to be in heaven: *he that came down from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven*, that is, in respect of his divinity by which he is every-where present: *And he that came down from heaven* is here called *the Son of man*, by the same figure that his blood is elsewhere called *the blood of God*, Acts xx. 28. the apostle ascribing that to one na-

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ture which is proper to the other : this we take to be the most natural and easy sense of this text, and most agreeable to the tenour of the new testament.

Again ; John vi. 62. *What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before ?* So that if he really ascended up into heaven after his resurrection, he was really there before his incarnation.

Before Abraham was, says our blessed SAVIOUR, *I am ;* John viii. 58. the obvious sense of which words is, that he had a real existence before Abraham was actually in being.

Again it is said, John xiii. 3. that *JESUS knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from GOD, and went to GOD, &c.*

And again ; John xvi. 27, 28. *For the Father himself loveth you, because ye loved me, and have believed that I came out from GOD. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world ;* again, ver. 28. *I leave the world, and go to the Father :* This was so very plain, that his disciples, who were slow enough of apprehension in other things, did understand this so well, that upon this declaration of his they were convinced of his omniscience, which is an incommunicable property of the divinity : for so it immediately follows, ver. 29, 30. *His disciples said unto him, LORD, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no parable : Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee : By this we believe that thou camest forth from GOD.* So that either this which I have all along declared must be the meaning of our SAVIOUR's words, or else his disciples were grossly mistaken and did not understand him at all : and if so, then surely our SAVIOUR before he had proceeded any further would have corrected their mistake, and have set them right in this matter : but so far is he from doing that, that he allows them to have understood him aright : for thus it follows, ver. 31. *JESUS answered them, Do ye now believe ? As if he had said, I am glad that you are at last convinced and do believe that I came from GOD, and must return to him ; and that I know all things,* which

which none but G O D can do. Is it now possible for any man to read this passage, and yet not to be convinced that the disciples understood our SAVIOUR to speak literally? But if his meaning was as the Socinians would make us believe, then the disciples did perfectly mistake his words; the contrary whereof is, I think, very plain and evident beyond all contradiction.

Again, John xvii. 5. *And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee, before the world was*: this surely is not spoken of his being with G O D after his incarnation, and before his entrance upon his publick ministry: they have not, I think, the face to understand this expression, *before the world was*, of the new creation, but do endeavour to avoid it another way, which I shall consider by and by.

And a little after, ver. 8. *I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and known assuredly that I came from thee, and that thou didst send me.*

Again, 1 John i. 1, 2. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life: for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, for so he calls the Son of G O D, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.*

And that he was not only with G O D before he assumed human nature, but also was really G O D, St. Paul tells us: Phil. ii. 5, 6, 7, 8. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in CHRIST JESUS, who being in the form of G O D, ἐχ' ἀπαυμὸν ἡγήσατο, did not arrogate to himself to be equal with G O D, that is, he made no ostentation of his divinity: for this I take to be the true meaning of that phrase, both because it is so used by Plutarch, and because it makes the sense much more easy and current, thus, who being in the form of G O D, did not assume an equality with G O D, that is, he did not appear in the glory of his divinity, which was hid under a veil of hu-*

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man flesh and infirmity; *but he emptied himself, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, or in the habit of a man, he became obedient to the death, &c.* So that if *his being made in the likeness and fashion of a man* does signify, that he was really man by his incarnation, then surely *his being in the form of GOD* when he took upon him *the fashion and likeness of man*; and *the form of a servant* or slave, must in all reason signify that he was really GOD before he became man: for which reason the same apostle did not doubt to say, *1 Tim. iii. 16. that GOD was manifested in the flesh.*

And now I hope that I have made it fully appear, that the beginning of St. John's gospel is not the single and only text upon which we ground this great doctrine, as Socinus calls it, and as we really esteem it to be: for you see that I have produced a great many more; to avoid the dint and force whereof the Socinians do chiefly make use of these two answers.

First, to those texts which say *he was in heaven*, and *came down from heaven*, they give this answer; that our SAVIOUR, some time before his entrance upon his publick ministry, they cannot agree precisely when, was taken up into heaven, and then and there had the will of GOD revealed to him, and was sent down from heaven again to make it known to the world.

This is so very arbitrary and precarious a supposition, that I must confess myself not a little out of countenance for them, that men of so much wit and reason should ever be put to so sorry and pitiful a shift. For can any man imagine, that in so exact a history of our SAVIOUR's life, written by several persons, the relation of so important a matter as this, and of the circumstances of it, should be wholly omitted? That we should have a particular account of his being carried into Egypt in his infancy, and of the time when he was brought back from thence: of his disputing in the temple with the jewish doctors, and putting them to silence when he was but twelve years of age: a punctual relation of his being baptized by John; and how after that *he was led by the spirit*

*into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and was carried by that evil spirit from one place to another: but not one word of his being taken up by God into heaven, and of his coming down again from thence; not the least intimation given either of the time or any other circumstance of so memorable a thing, upon which, according to the Socinians, the authority of his mission, and the divinity of his doctrine did so much depend: when so many things of so much less moment are so minutely and exactly reported, what can be the reason of this deep silence in all the evangelists concerning this matter? But, above all, it is to be wondered that St. John, who wrote his gospel last, and, as Eusebius tells us, on purpose to supply the omissions of the other evangelists, should give no account of this thing, and yet, as the Socinians suppose, should so often take it for granted, and refer to it; as when it is said that *he came forth from God*, and was *sent from God*, and *came down from heaven*, besides several other expressions to this purpose.*

Who can believe this? And can it then be reasonable to suppose such a thing? and this without any ground from the history of the gospel, only to serve an hypothesis which they had taken up, and which they cannot maintain, unless they may have leave to make a supposition, for which they have nothing in truth to say, but only that it is necessary to defend an opinion, which they are resolved not to part with upon any terms?

This is so inartificial, not to say absurd a way of avoiding a difficulty, to take for granted whatever is necessary to that purpose, that no man of common ingenuity would make use of it: and there is no surer sign that a cause is greatly distressed, than to be driven to such a shift. For do but give a man leave to suppose what he pleases, and he may prove what he will, and avoid any difficulty whatever that can be objected to him.

Besides, that according to this device the Son of God did not first come from heaven into the world, as the scripture seems every where to say, but first was in the world, and then went to heaven, and from thence came back into the world again; and he was *not in the beginning*

ning with GOD, but was first in the world, and afterwards with GOD; whereas St. John says, that the *Word was in the beginning*, and then *was made flesh*, and dwelt among us: but they say, that he first *was made flesh*, and then a great while after was *in the beginning with GOD*: A supposition which is quite contrary to all the texts which I have mentioned.

Nor do the several parts of this interpretation of theirs agree very well together. *In the beginning*, that is, say they, when the gospel first began to be published, *was the Word*; and then, that is, *in the beginning*, *he was with GOD*, that is, in heaven, to receive from GOD that doctrine which he was to deliver to the world: but if by *the beginning* be meant the first publication of the gospel, he was not then with GOD, but had been with him, and was come back from him before he entred upon his publick ministry, which they make to be the meaning of *the beginning*: and *in the beginning he was GOD*, that is, say they, not GOD by nature, but by office and divine constitution: and yet in this again they fall foul upon themselves, for they say he was not declared to be GOD till after his resurrection, and his being advanced to the right-hand of GOD: so that he was not GOD in their sense of *the beginning*, that is, when he entred upon his publick ministry, and began to preach the gospel.

Secondly, as to some other texts which speak of his existence before his incarnation, as that he was *glorified with his Father before the world was*; and *before Abraham was, I am*: these they interpret thus, that *he was glorified with his Father before the world was*, and that he was before *Abraham was*, viz. in the divine foreknowledge and decree: but then surely they do not consider that this is nothing but what might have been said of any other man, and even of Abraham himself, that *before he was*, that is, before he had a real and actual existence, he was in the purpose and decree of GOD, that is, before he was, GOD did intend he should be: which is a sense so very flat, that I can hardly abstain from saying it is ridiculous. For certainly our SAVIOUR did intend, by saying this of himself, to give himself some preference

and advantage above Abraham, which this sense and interpretation does not in the least do : because of any other man, as well as of our blessed SAVIOUR it may as truly be said, that he was in the foreknowledge and decree of GOD before Abraham was born.

And I cannot but observe further, that our SAVIOUR does not say before Abraham was, I was ; but *before Abraham was, I AM* : which is the proper name of GOD, whereby is signified the eternal duration and permanency of his being : in which sense he is said by the apostle to the Hebrews to be *the same yesterday, to day, and for ever*, Heb. xiii. 8. and so likewise he describes himself in St. John's visions, Rev. i. 8. *I am α and ω, the beginning and the ending, saith the LORD, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty* : and that this is spoken of the Son you may see in the same chapter, ver. 17. where he says of himself, *I am the first and the last* : and so likewise he describes himself again, Rev. xxii. 13. *I am α and ω, the beginning and the end, the first and the last* : and that we may not doubt who it is that thus describes his own eternity, he continuing still to speak in the same person, says, ver. 16. *I JESUS have sent mine angel, &c.* After this I shall only observe, that all these expressions are the common description which the scripture gives of the eternity of GOD, whose being is commensurate to all the several respects of *duration, past, present, and to come* : besides, that the attribute of Almighty is also a part of this description, which is so peculiar a property of GOD, I mean of him who is GOD by nature, that the scripture never gives it to any other.

II. I shall in the next place produce those texts which do expressly affirm *that the world and all the creatures whatsoever were made by him* : and this will not only infer his existence before his incarnation, but from all eternity.

And for this, besides this passage of St. John, we have the apostle to the Hebrews most express, who says, Heb. i. 2. that *by him GOD made the worlds* : and St. Paul likewise says the same more fully and particularly, calling JESUS CHRIST, who was the SON of GOD, *the first-*

first-born of every creature, Coloss. i. 15, 16. that is, as I have shewn in my former discourse, the *beir and lord of the whole creation*: for by him, says he, *were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones or dominions, principalities or powers*; for so he calls the several orders of angels: *all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things*: or, as he is described in St. John's vision, he is *the beginning of the creation of God*, that is, the principal and efficient cause of the creation; or else, he was when all things began to be made, and therefore must be before any thing was created, and for that reason could not be a creature himself; and consequently, must of necessity have been from all eternity.

Now these texts must necessarily be understood of the old creation, and of the natural world, and not of the moral world, and the renovation and reformation of the minds and manners of men by the gospel: for that was only the world here below which was reformed by him, and not things in heaven; not the invisible world, not the several orders of *good angels, which kept their first station*, and have no need to be reformed and made anew: nor the devil and his evil angels; for though since the preaching of the gospel they have been under greater restraint, and kept more within bounds, yet we have no reason to think that they are at all reformed, but are devils still, and have the same malice and mind to do all the mischief to mankind that God will suffer them to do.

So that these texts seem, at first view, to be very plain and pressing of themselves, but they appear to be much more convincing, when we consider the groundless interpretations whereby they endeavour to evade the dint and force of them. For can any man that seriously attends to the perpetual stile and phrase of the new testament, and to the plain scope and drift of the apostle's reasoning in these texts, be induced to believe that when St. Paul tells us, that *all things were created by him, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible; whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers*: I say, can any man of good sense persuade himself, that by all

this the apostle means no more than the moral renovation of the world here below, and the reformation of mankind by JESUS CHRIST, and his gospel which was preached unto them?

But there is yet one text more to this purpose, which I have reserved to the last place; because I find Schlictingius and Crellius, in their joint comment upon it, to be put to their last shifts to avoid the force of it. It is in the epistle to the Hebrews, at the beginning of it; where the apostle thus describes the Son of GOD; GOD, says he, Heb. i. 2. *hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath constituted heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds*: from whence he argues the excellency of the gospel above the law: for the law was given by angels, but the gospel by the Son of GOD; whose preeminence above the angels he shews at large in the two first chapters of this epistle.

And to this end he proves the two parts of the description which had been given of him, namely, that GOD had constituted him heir of all things, and that by him he made the worlds, ver. 2.

First, that GOD had constituted him heir of all things, which is no where said of the angels: but of him it is said ver. 4. that he was made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. The angels are only called GOD's ministers, for which the apostle cites the words of the psalmist; Psal. civ. 4. but to CHRIST he gives the title of his Son, and his first begotten, ver. 6. by virtue whereof he is heir of all things: for to which of the angels said he at any time, *thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee*? And this I will agree with them to be spoken of CHRIST, with respect to his resurrection, by which, as St. Paul tells us Rom. i. 4. he was powerfully declared to be the Son of GOD. This is the first prerogative of CHRIST above the angels: but there is a far greater yet behind; for he proves,

Secondly, That he had not only the title of GOD given him; but that he was truly and really GOD, because he made the world, Heb. i. 8. That the title of

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GOD was given him, he proves by a citation out of the psalmist, *but unto the Son he saith, thy throne, O GOD, is for ever and ever, &c.* Psal. xlv. 6, 7. And that he was truly and really GOD, because *he made the world*, he proves by a citation out of another psalm, where it is said of him, *Thou, LORD, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands: they shall perish, &c.* Heb. i. 10, 11, 12.

Let us now see how Schlictingius and Crellius interpret this text cited out of the Psalmist by the apostle, as spoken of CHRIST. They say, * that the author of this epistle could not have referred to CHRIST the former words of this citation, which speak of the creation of heaven and earth, unless he had taken it for granted that CHRIST is the most high GOD; especially if they be understood, as they must necessarily be by those who take this for granted, to be spoken in the first place and directly to, or concerning CHRIST. For since all the words of the psalm are manifestly spoken of the most high GOD, but that CHRIST is that GOD is not signified, no not so much as by one word in that psalm, it is necessary that if you will have these words to be directed to CHRIST, you must take it for granted that CHRIST is that most high GOD of whom the psalmist there speaks.

Now we will join issue with these interpreters upon this concession, viz. that the author of this epistle could not have referred these words, which speak of the creation of heaven and earth, to CHRIST, without taking it

* Ne referre quidem hæc priora verba, de cœli terræque creatione loquentia, ad Christum potuisset autor, nisi pro concessio summisset Christum esse summum illum Deum, cœli & terræ creatorem; præsertim si ea, ut necesse foret, primò & directè ad Christum dicta esse censeas. Nam cum omnia psalmi verba manifestè de Deo loquuntur, Christum autem Deum illum esse ne unico quidem verbo in toto hoc psalmo indicetur; necesse est ut si verba illa ad Christum directà esse velis, pro concessio sumas, Christum esse Deum illum summum de quo in psalmo sermo est.

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for granted that CHRIST is truly that GOD who made the world. And if the author of this epistle does affirm these words of the psalmist to be spoken of CHRIST, then they must acknowledge CHRIST to be the true GOD who made heaven and earth : but the author of this epistle does as evidently affirm these words to be spoken to or of CHRIST, as he does the words of any other text cited in this chapter : and for this I appeal to the common sense of every man that reads them.

These interpreters indeed are contented that the latter part of this citation should be spoken of CHRIST, but not the former : but why not the former as well as the latter ? when they have so expressly told us that all the words of this psalm are manifestly spoken of GOD. What is the mystery of this ? Could they not as easily have interpreted the former part which speaks of the creation of heaven and earth, concerning the moral world, and the new creation or reformation of mankind by JESUS CHRIST and his gospel, as well as so many other plain texts to the same purpose ? No doubt they could as well have done it, and have set as good a face upon it when they had done it. But why then did they not do it ? It was for a reason which they had no mind to tell, but yet it is not hard to be guessed at, namely, that if they had admitted the former words to have been spoken of CHRIST, they knew not what to do with the latter part of this citation, ver. 11, 12. *They shall perish, but thou remainest ; they shall wax old as a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed.* What shall perish, and wax old, and be changed ? Why, the earth and the heavens which the Son had made, that is, the moral world, the reformation of mankind, and the new creation of things by the gospel. All these must have undergone the same fate with the natural world, and must not only have been defaced, but utterly destroyed and brought to nothing. This they would not say, but they did see it ; though they would not seem to see it : and we may plainly see by this, that they can interpret a text right when necessity forceth them to it, and they cannot with-

out great inconvenience to their cause avoid it : but when men have once resolved to hold fast an opinion they have taken up, it then becomes not only convenient but necessary to understand nothing that makes against it : and this is truly the present case : but in the mean time where is ingenuity and love of truth ?

And thus I have, with all the clearness and brevity I could, searched to the very foundations of this new interpretation of this passage of the evangelist, upon which the divinity of the Son of God is so firmly established ; and likewise of the gross misinterpretations of several other texts to the same purpose in this evangelist, and in other books of the new testament : all which interpretations I have endeavoured to shew to be not only contrary to the sense of all antiquity, of which as Socinus had but little knowledge, so he seems to have made but little account ; but to be also evidently contrary to the perpetual tenour and stile of the holy scripture.

Before I go off from this argument, I cannot but take notice of one thing, wherein our adversaries in this cause do perpetually glory, as a mighty advantage which they think they have over us in this point of the divinity of the Son of God, and consequently in that other point of the blessed Trinity : namely, that they have reason clearly on their side in this controversy, and that the difficulties and absurdities are much greater and plainer on our part than on theirs.

Here they are pleased to triumph without modesty, and without measure : and yet notwithstanding this, I am not afraid here likewise to join issue with them, and am contented to have this matter brought to a fair trial at the bar of reason, as well as of scripture, expounded by the general tradition of the Christian church : I say by general tradition, which next to scripture is the best and surest confirmation of this great point now in question between us, and that which gives us the greatest and truest light for the right understanding of the true sense and meaning of scripture not only in this, but in most other important doctrines of the Christian religion.

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I am not without some good hopes, I will not say confidence, for I never thought that to be so great an advantage to any cause as some men would be glad to make others believe it is, hoping to help and support a weak argument by a strong and mighty confidence: but surely modesty never hurt any cause, and the confidence of man seems to me to be much like the wrath of man, which St. James tells us, chap. i. ver. 20. *worketh not the righteousness of God*; that is, it never does any good, it never serves any wise and real purpose of religion.

I say, I am not without some good hopes, that I have in the foregoing discourses clearly shewn, that the tenour of scripture and general tradition are on our side in this argument, and therefore I shall not need to give myself the trouble to examine this matter over again.

Now as to the point of reason, the great difficulty and absurdity, which they object to our doctrine concerning this mystery, amounts to thus much, that it is not only above reason, but plainly contrary to it.

As to its being above reason, which they are loth to admit any thing to be; this I think will bear no great dispute: because if they would be pleased to speak out, they can mean no more by this, but that our reason is not able fully to comprehend it: but what then? Are there no mysteries in religion? That I am sure they will not say, because God, whose infinite nature and perfections are the very foundation of religion, is certainly the greatest mystery of all other, and the most incomprehensible: but we must not, nay they will not for this reason deny, that there is such a being as God. And therefore if there be mysteries in religion, it is no reasonable objection against them that we cannot fully comprehend them: because all mysteries in what kind soever, whether in religion or in nature, so long, and so far as they are mysteries, are for that very reason incomprehensible.

But they urge the matter much farther, that this particular mystery now under debate is plainly contrary to reason: and if they can make this good, I will confess that they have gained a great point upon us. But then

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they are to be put in mind, that to make this good against us they must clearly shew some plain contradiction in this doctrine, which I could never yet see done by any. Great difficulty I acknowledge there is in the explication of it, in which the farther we go, beyond what God has thought fit to reveal to us in scripture concerning it, the more we are entangled; and that which men are pleased to call an explaining of it, does, in my apprehension, often make it more obscure, that is, less plain than it was before; which does not so very well agree with a pretence of explication.

Here then I fix my foot: that there are three differences in the deity, which the scripture speaks of by the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and every where speaks of them as we use to do of three distinct persons: and therefore I see no reason why in this argument we should nicely abstain from using the word Person; though I remember that St. Jerom does somewhere desire to be excused from it.

Now concerning these three, I might in the first place urge that plain and express text, 1 John v. 7. *there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one*: but upon this I will not now insist, because it is pretended that in some copies of greatest antiquity this verse is omitted; the contrary whereof is I think capable of being made out very clearly: but this matter would be too long to be debated at present.

However that be, this much is certain and cannot be denied, that our SAVIOUR commanded his apostles to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: and that the apostles in their epistles do in their most usual form of benediction join these three together: and it is yet farther certain, that not only the name and title of God, but the most incommunicable properties and perfections of the deity, are in scripture frequently ascribed to the Son and the Holy Ghost; one property only excepted, which is peculiar to the Father, as he is the principle and fountain of the deity, that he is
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of himself and of no other; which is not, nor can be said of the Son and Holy Ghost.

Now let any man shew any plain and downright contradiction in all this; or any other difficulty besides this, that the particular manner of the existence of these three differences or persons in the divine nature, express'd in scripture by the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is incomprehensible by our finite understandings, and inexplicable by us: in which I do not see what absurdity there is, since our adversaries cannot deny that many things certainly are, the particular manner of whose existence we can neither comprehend, nor explain.

Let us now see, whether the opinion of our adversaries hath not greater difficulties in it, and more palpable absurdities following from it. They say, that the Son of God is a mere creature; not God by nature, and yet truly and really God by office and by divine appointment and constitution; to whom the very same honour and worship is to be given which we give to him who is God by nature.

And can they discern no difficulty, no absurdity in this? What? no absurdity in bringing idolatry by a back-door into the Christian religion, one main design whereof was to banish idolatry out of the world? And will they in good earnest contest this matter with us, that the giving divine worship to a mere creature is not idolatry? And can they vindicate themselves in this point any other way, than what will in a great measure acquit both the pagans and the papists from the charge of idolatry?

What? no absurdity in a god as it were but of yesterday? in a creature-god, in a god merely by positive institution; and this in opposition to a plain moral precept of eternal obligation, and to the fixed and immutable nature and reason of things?

So that to avoid the shadow and appearance of a plurality of deities they run really into it, and for any thing I can see into downright idolatry, by *worshipping a creature besides the Creator, who is blessed for ever*, Rom. i. 25. They can by no means allow two gods by nature; no

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more can we : but they can willingly admit of two gods ; the one by nature, and the other by office, to whom they are content to pay the same honour which is due to him who is **GOD** by nature. Provided **CHRIST** will be contented to be but a creature, they will deal more liberally with him in another way than in reason is fit.

And do they see no absurdity in all this ? Nothing that is contrary to reason and good sense ? Nothing that feels like inconsistency and contradiction ? Do they consider how often **GOD** hath declared that *he will not give his glory to another* ? And that the apostle describes idolatry to be, the giving service, or worship, to things *which by nature are no gods* ? Gal. iv. 8.

Surely, if reason guided by divine revelation were to choose a god, it would make choice of one who is declared in scripture to be *the only begotten of the Father, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the same yesterday, to day, and for ever* : much rather than a mere creature, who did not begin to be till about seventeen hundred years ago.

I only propose these things, without any artificial aggravation, to their most serious and impartial consideration ; after which I cannot think that these great masters of reason can think it so easy a matter to extricate themselves out of these difficulties. The **GOD of truth** lead us into all truth, and enlighten the minds of those who are in error, and give them *repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth* : for his sake who is *the way, the truth, and the life*.

And thus much may suffice to have said upon this argument, which I am sensible is mere controversy : a thing which I seldom meddle with, and do not delight to dwell upon. But my text, which is so very proper for this season, hath almost necessarily engaged me in it : besides, that I think it a point of that concernment, that all Christians ought to be well instructed in it. And I have chosen rather once for all to handle it fully, and to go to the bottom of it, than in every sermon to be flirting at it, without saying any thing to the purpose against it :

a way which in my opinion is neither proper to establish men in the truth, nor to convince them of their error.

I shall only at present make this short reflection upon the whole: that we ought to treat the holy scriptures as the oracles of God, with all reverence and submission of mind to the doctrine therein revealed: and to interpret them with that candor and simplicity which is due to the sincere declarations of God intended for the instruction, and not for the deception and delusion of men: I say, we should treat them as the oracles of God, and not like the doubtful oracles of the heathen deities, that is, in truth of the devil; which were contrived and calculated on purpose to deceive, containing and for the most part intending a sense directly contrary to the appearing and most obvious meaning of the words: for the devil was the first author of equivocation; though the Jesuits have since made it a lawful way of lying, which their father, of whom they learned it, had not credit and authority enough to do.

And it deserves likewise to be very well considered by us, that nothing hath given a greater force to the exceptions of the church of Rome against the holy scriptures being a sufficient and certain rule of faith, than the uncertainty into which they have brought the plainest text imaginable for the establishing of doctrines of greater moment in the Christian religion, by their remote and wrested interpretation of them: which way of dealing with them seems to be really more contumelious to those holy oracles, than the downright rejecting of their authority because this is a fair and open way of attacking them whereas the other is an insidious and therefore more dangerous way of undermining them.

But as for us, who do in good earnest believe the divine authority of the holy scriptures, let us take all our doctrines and opinions from those clear fountains of truth not disturbed and darkned by searching anxiously into all the possible senses that the several words and expressions of scripture can bear, and by forcing that sense upon them which is most remote and unnatural, and in the mean time wilfully overlooking and passing by that sense which is most

vious and easy to the common apprehension of any un-bias'd and impartial reader. This is to use the holy scriptures as the church of Rome hath done many holy and good men, whom they are pleased to brand with the odious name of hereticks, to torture them till they speak the mind of their tormentors, though never so contrary to their own.

I will now conclude this whole discourse with a saying which I heard from a great and judicious man, *Non amo nimis argutam theologiam, I love no doctrines in divinity, which stand so very much upon quirk and subtilty.* And I cannot upon this occasion forbear to say, that those doctrines of religion and those interpretations of scripture have ever been to me the most suspected, which need abundance of wit and a great many criticisms to make them out: and considering the wisdom and goodness of Almighty God, I cannot possibly believe but that all things necessary to be believed and practis'd by Christians, in order to their eternal salvation, are plainly contained in the holy scriptures: God surely hath not dealt so hardly with mankind, as to make any thing necessary to be believed or practis'd by us, which he hath not made sufficiently plain to the capacity of the unlearned as well as of the learned. God forbid that it should be impossible for any man to be saved and to get to heaven without a great deal of learning to direct and carry him thither, when the far greatest part of mankind have no learning at all. It was well said by Erasmus, *That it was never well with the Christian world since it began to be a matter of so much subtilty and wit for a man to be a true Christian.*



S E R M O N XLV.

Concerning the Incarnation of CHRIST.

Preached in the church of St. Lawrence-
Jewry, December 21, 1680.

J O H N i. 14.

The Word was made flesh.

THE last year about this time, and upon the same occasion of the annual commemoration of the incarnation and nativity of our blessed LORD and SAVIOUR, I began to discourse to you upon these words: in which I told you were contained three great points concerning our SAVIOUR, the author and founder of our religion.

First, his incarnation, *the Word was made, or became flesh.*

Secondly, his life and conversation here amongst us; and dwelt among us, ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, *he pitched his tabernacle among us*, he lived here below in this world, and for some time made his residence and abode with us.

Thirdly, that in this state of his humiliation he gave great and clear evidence of his divinity: whilst he appeared as a man and lived amongst us, there were great and glorious testimonies given of him that he was the Son of GOD; and that in so peculiar a manner as no creature can be said to be; *and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

I began with the first of these, namely, his incarnation, *the Word was made flesh*: for the full and clear explication of which words I proposed to consider these two things.

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I. The person here spoken of, and who it is that is here said to be incarnate, or *made flesh*, namely, the Word. And this I have handled at large in my two former discourses upon this text. I shall now proceed in the

II. Second place to give some account of the nature and manner of this incarnation, so far as the scripture hath thought fit to reveal and declare this mystery to us. *The Word was made flesh*, that is, he who is personally called the Word, and whom the evangelist hath so fully and clearly described in the beginning of his gospel, he *became flesh*, that is, assumed our nature and became man, for so the Word *flesh* is frequently used in scripture for man or human nature.

So that by the Word's becoming flesh, that is, man, the evangelist did not only intend to express to us that he assumed a human body without a soul, but that he became a perfect man, consisting of soul and body united. It is very probable indeed that the evangelist did purposely choose the word *flesh*, which signifies the frail and mortal part of humanity, to denote to us the great condescension of the Son of GOD, in assuming our nature with all its infirmities, and becoming subject to frailty and mortality for our sake.

Having thus explained the meaning of this proposition, the *Word was made flesh*, I shall in a further prosecution of this argument take into consideration these three things.

First, I shall consider more distinctly what may reasonably be supposed to be implied in this expression, of the *Word's being made flesh*.

Secondly, I shall consider the objections which are commonly brought against this incarnation of the Son of GOD, from the seeming impossibility or incongruity of the thing.

Thirdly, and because, after all that can be said in answer to these objections, it may still appear to us very strange that GOD, who could without all this circumstance and condescension, even almost beneath the majesty of the great GOD, at least as we are apt to think, have

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given laws to mankind, and have offered forgiveness of sins and eternal life upon their repentance for sins past, and sincere though imperfect obedience for the future; I say, it may seem strange, that notwithstanding this God should yet make choice of this way and method of our salvation: I shall therefore in the last place endeavour to give some probable account of this strange and wonderful dispensation and shew that it was done in great condescension to the weakness and common prejudices of mankind; and that when it is thoroughly considered it will appear to be much more for our comfort and advantage than any other way which the wisdom of this world would have been apt to devise and pitch upon. And in all this I shall all along take either the plain declarations of scripture, or the pregnant intimations of it for my ground and guide.

I. I shall consider more distinctly what may reasonably be supposed to be implied in this expression of the *Word's being made flesh*, namely, these five things.

First, the truth and reality of the thing: that the Son of God did not only appear in the form of human flesh, but did really assume it; *the Word was made flesh*, as the evangelist expressly declares it: for if this had been only a phantasm and apparition, as some hereticks of old did fancy, it would in all probability have been like the appearance of angels mentioned in the old testament, sudden and of short continuance, and would after a little while have vanished and disappeared. But he *dwelt among us*, and conversed familiarly with us a long time, and for many years together; and the scripture useth all the expressions which are proper to signify a real man, and a real human body, and there were all the signs and evidences of reality that could be. For the Word is said to be made flesh, and CHRIST is said to be *of the seed of David according to the flesh*, and to be *made of a woman*; and all this to shew that he was a real man, and had a real and substantial body: for he was born, and by degrees grew up to be a man, and did perform all such actions as are natural and proper to men: he continued a great while in the world, and at last suffered and died

and was laid in the grave. He did not vanish and disappear like a phantasm or spirit, but he died like other men: and his body was raised again out of the grave; and after he was risen, he conversed forty days upon earth, and permitted his body to be handled, and last of all was visibly taken up into heaven.

So that either we must grant him to have had a real body, or we have cause to doubt whether all mankind be not mere phantasms and apparitions. For greater evidence no man can give that he is really clothed with and carries about him a true and substantial body, than the Son of God did in the days of his flesh. It is to me very wonderful upon what ground, or indeed to what end, the hereticks of old, Marcion and others, did deny the reality of CHRIST's flesh. Surely they had a great mind to be hereticks, who took up so senseless an opinion for no reason, and to no purpose.

Secondly, another thing implied in the *Word's being made flesh* is, that this was done peculiarly for the benefit and advantage of men. *The Word was made flesh*, that is, became man; for so I have shewn the word flesh to be often used in scripture. And this the author of the epistle to the Hebrews takes very special notice of, as a great grace and favour of God to mankind, that his Son appeared in our nature, and consequently for our salvation; as it is said in the Nicene creed, *who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate, &c.* For verily, says the apostle, Heb. ii. 16. *he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham, ἔ γὰρ ὁπρὸς ἀγγέλων ἐπιλαμβάνεται*, he did not assume the angelick nature, so our translators understood the phrase; but the word also signifies to take hold of a thing which is falling, as well as to assume or take on him. He did not take hold of the angels when they were falling, but suffered them to lapse irrecoverably into misery and ruin: but he took hold of human nature when it was falling, and particularly of the seed of Abraham, and by the seed of Abraham, that is, by himself, in whom all the nations of the earth were blessed, he brought salvation first to the Jews, and then to the rest

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rest of mankind. The apostle chooses to derive this blessing from Abraham, that so he might bring it nearer to the Jews to whom he wrote this epistle, and might thereby more effectually recommend the gospel to them, and the glad tidings of that great salvation, in which they had so peculiar an interest.

And it is some confirmation of the interpretation I have given of that expression, *he took not on him, &c.* That the evangelist uses the very same word for taking hold of one that was ready to sink: for so it is said of St. Peter when he was ready to sink, that CHRIST put forth his hand *καὶ ἐπιλάβετο*, and caught hold of him, and saved him from drowning: and thus the Son of GOD caught hold of mankind, which was ready to sink into eternal perdition: he laid hold of our nature, or as it is expressed in the same chapter, *he took part of flesh and blood*, that in our nature he might be capable of effecting our redemption and deliverance.

But it is no where said in scripture, not the least intimation given there, that the Son of GOD ever shewed such grace and favour to the angels: but *the Word became flesh*, that is, became man: he did not assume the angelical nature, but was contented to be clothed with the rags of humanity, and to be made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that is, of sinful man.

Thirdly, this expression of *the Word's being made flesh*, may farther imply his assuming the infirmities, and submitting to the miseries of human nature. This I collect from the word *flesh*, by which the scripture often uses to express our frail and mortal nature. The Son of GOD did not only condescend to be made man, but also to become mortal and miserable for our sakes: he submitted to all those things which are accounted most grievous and calamitous to human nature: to hunger and want, to shame and contempt, to bitter pains and agonies, and to a most cruel and disgraceful death: so that in this sense also he became flesh, not only by being clothed with human nature, but by becoming liable to all the frailties and sufferings of it; of which he had a greater share than any of the sons of men ever had; for never was

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sorrow like to his sorrow, nor sufferings like to his sufferings, the weight and bitterness whereof was such as to wring from him, the meekest and most patient endurer of sufferings that ever was, that doleful complaint, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Fourthly, in this expression, *the Word is made flesh*, is likewise implied the union of the divinity with human nature in one person. And this the text expresseth in such words as seem to signify a most perfect, and intimate, and vital union of the divine and human natures of CHRIST in one person: *the Word was made*, or became, *flesh*; which what else can it signify but one of these two Things? Either that the eternal word and only begotten Son of GOD was changed into a man, which is not only impossible to be, but impious to imagine: or else, that the Son of GOD did assume our nature, and became man, by his divinity being united to human nature as the soul is vitally united to the body; without either being changed into it, or confounded with it, or swallowed up by it, as the Eutychian hereticks fancied the human nature of CHRIST to be swallowed up of his divinity: which had it been so, St. John had expressed himself very untowardly when he says, *the Word became flesh*; for it had been quite contrary, and flesh had become the Word, being changed in it, and swallowed up by it, and lost in it.

The only thing then that we can reasonably imagine to be the meaning of this expression is this, that the Son of GOD assumed our nature, and united himself with it, so that our souls are united with our bodies: and as the soul and body united make one person, and yet retain their distinct natures and properties; so may we conceive the divine and human natures in CHRIST to be united into one person: and this without any change or confusion of the two natures.

I say, the divinity united itself with human nature: though flesh be only mentioned in the text, yet he did not only assume a human body, which was the heresy of Apollinaris and his followers, upon a mistake of this and some other texts of scripture: but he assumed the whole

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whole human nature, that is, a human soul united to a real and natural body: for so I have shewn the word flesh to be frequently used in scripture, not only for the body but for the whole man, by an usual figure of speech: as on the other hand, soul is frequently used for the whole man or person: so many souls are said to have gone down with Jacob into Egypt, that is, so many persons.

But this I need not insist longer upon, our SAVIOUR being so frequently in scripture, and so expressly said to be a man; which could with no propriety of speech have been said, had he only assumed a human body: nor could he have been said to have been *made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted*, had he only a human body but not a soul? For then the meaning must have been, that he had been *made in all things like unto us*, that is, like to a man, that only excepted which chiefly makes the man, that is, the soul: and the addition of those words, *sin only excepted*, had been no less strange; because a human body, without a soul, is neither capable of being said to have sin, or to be without it.

And this may suffice to have been spoken in general, concerning that great mystery of the hypostatical, as they that love hard words love to call it, or personal union of the divine and human natures in the person of our blessed SAVIOUR: in the more particular explication whereof, it is not safe for our shallow understandings to wade farther than the scripture goes before us, for fear we go out of our depth and lose ourselves in the profound inquiry into the deep things of GOD, which he has not thought fit in this present state of darkness and imperfection, to reveal more plainly and fully to us. It ought to be thought sufficient, that the scripture speaking of the same person, JESUS CHRIST our blessed SAVIOUR, doth frequently and expressly call him both GOD and man: which how it can be so easily conceived upon any other supposition, than that of the union of the divine and human natures in one person, I must confess that I am not able to comprehend.

Fifthly and lastly, all this which I have shewn to be implied in this proposition, *the Word was made flesh*

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does signify to us the wonderful and amazing condescension and love of GOD to mankind in sending his son into the world, and submitting him to this way and method for our salvation and recovery. *The Word was made flesh*: what a step is here made in order to the reconciling of men to GOD? From heaven to earth; from the top of glory and majesty to the lowest gulf of meanness and misery: the evangelist seems here to use the word flesh, which signifies the meanest and vilest part of humanity, to express to us how low the Son of GOD was contented to stoop for the redemption of man. *The Word was made flesh*: two terms, at the greatest distance from one another, are here brought together: the Son of GOD is here expressed to us by one of his highest and most glorious titles, the Word, which imports both power and wisdom; CHRIST *the power of GOD, and the wisdom of GOD*, as the apostle calls him: 1 Cor. i. 24. and human nature is here described by its vilest part, flesh; which imports frailty and infirmity: *the Word became flesh*, that is, submitted to that from which it was at the greatest distance: *He who was the power of GOD, and the wisdom of GOD*, submitted not only to be called, but really to become a frail and miserable man; not only to assume our nature, but to put on all the infirmities, and which is the greatest of all, the mortality of it.

And this is the great mystery of godliness, that is, of the Christian religion, that GOD should be *manifested in the flesh, and become man*, with a most gracious and merciful design to bring man back again to GOD: that he should become a miserable, and a mortal man to save us from eternal death, and to make us partakers of everlasting life: that the Son of GOD should condescend to inhabit our vile nature, to wear rags and to become a beggar for our sakes; and all this, not only to repair those dismal ruins which sin had made in it, and to restore us to our former estate; but to better and advance our condition, and by degrees to bring us to a state of much greater perfection and happiness than that from which we fell.

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And that he should become man on purpose that he might dwell among us, and converse with us, and thoroughly instruct us in our duty, and shew us the way to eternal life by his heavenly doctrine, and as it were take us by the hand, and lead us into that way by the perfect and familiar example of a most blameless and holy life; shewing us how God himself thought fit to live in this world, when he was pleased to become man.

That by conversing with us in the likeness and nature of man, he might become a human, and in some sort an equal and familiar, an imitable and encouraging example of innocency and goodness, of meekness and humility, of patience and submission to the will of God under the sorest afflictions and sufferings, and in a word, a most perfect pattern of a divine and heavenly conversation upon earth.

And that by this means we might, for our greater encouragement in holiness and virtue, see all that which the law of God requires of us exemplified in our nature, and really performed and practised by a man like ourselves.

And that likewise in our nature he might conquer and triumph over the two great enemies of our salvation, the world and the devil: and by first suffering death, and then overcoming it, and by rescuing our nature from the power of it by his resurrection from the dead, he might deliver us from the fear of death, and give us the glorious hopes of a blessed immortality: for by assuming our frail and mortal nature he became capable of suffering and of shedding his precious blood for us, and by that means of purchasing *forgiveness of sins and eternal redemption for us.*

And farther yet, that by being subject to the miseries and infirmities of humanity, he might from his own experience, the surest and most sensible sort of knowledge and instruction, learn to have a more compassionate sense of our infirmities, and be more apt to commiserate us in all our sufferings and temptations, and more ready to succour us labouring under them.

And finally, that as a reward of his obedience and sufferings in our nature, he might in the same nature be exalted to the right-hand of the majesty on high, there to continue for ever to make intercession for us.

II. I shall in the next place consider the objections against the incarnation of the Son of GOD, from the supposed impossibility and incongruity of the thing. I shall mention three, and endeavour in as few words as I can to give a clear and satisfactory answer to them.

First, it is objected, that the incarnation of the Son of GOD, as I have explained it, necessarily supposing an union of the divinity with human nature is, if not altogether impossible, yet a very unintelligible thing.

Now that there is no impossibility in the thing seems to be very evident from the instance whereby I have endeavoured to illustrate it, of the union between the soul and the body of man, which we must acknowledge to be a thing possible, because we are sure that it is; and yet no man can explain, either to himself or to any one else, the manner how it is, or can be conceived to be; but for all that we are certain, as we can be of any thing, that it is so.

And is it not every whit as possible for GOD, if he so please, to unite himself to human nature, as it is for the soul to be united to the body? And that we are not able to conceive the manner how this is or can be done, ought not in reason to be any prejudice against the truth and certainty of the thing: This indeed may make it seem strange to us, but by no means incredible: because we do most firmly believe a great many things to be, the manner of whose being we do not at all comprehend.

And therefore I take it for an undoubted principle which no man can gainsay, that to assure us that a thing really is, it is not necessary for us to know the manner how it is, or can be: It is sufficient for us to know, that the thing is not impossible; and of that we have the very best demonstration that can be, if we be sure that it is.

Secondly, supposing this thing to be possible, and capable in any measure to be understood, which yet I have

shewn not to be necessary to our firm belief of it; it is farther objected, that it seems to be a thing very incongruous, and much beneath the dignity of the Son of GOD, to be united to human nature, and to submit to so near an alliance with that which is so very mean and despicable: yea to be infinitely more below him, than for the greatest prince in this world to match with the poorest and most contemptible beggar.

But herein surely we measure GOD too much by ourselves, and because we who are evil have seldom so much goodness as to stoop beneath ourselves for the benefit and good of others, we are apt to think that GOD hath not so much goodness neither: and because our ill nature, and pride, and folly, as indeed all pride is folly, will not suffer us to do it, we presently conclude that it does not become GOD. But what Pliny said to the emperor Trajan concerning earthly kings and potentates, is much more true of the LORD of glory, the great king of heaven and earth; *Cui nihil ad augendum fastigium superest, hoc uno modo crescere potest, si seipsum submittat, securus magnitudinis suæ*, *He that is at the top, and can rise no higher, hath yet this one way left to become greater, by stooping beneath himself*; which he may very safely do, *being secure of his own greatness*. The lower any being, be he never so high, condescends to do good, the glory of his goodness shines so much the brighter. Men are many times too proud and stiff to bend, too perverse and ill-natured to stoop beneath their own little greatness for the good of others: but GOD, whose ways are not as our ways, and whose thoughts are as much above our low and natural thoughts, *as the heavens are high above the earth*, did not disdain nor think it below him to become man for the good of mankind; and, as much as the divinity is capable of being so, to become miserable to make us happy. We may be afraid that if we humble ourselves we shall be despised, that if we stoop others will get above us and trample upon us: but GOD, though he condescend never so low, is still secure of his own greatness, and that none can take it from him.

So that in truth, and according to right reason, it was no real diminution or disparagement to the Son of GOD to become man for the salvation of mankind: but on the contrary, it was a most glorious humility, and the greatest instance of the truest goodness that ever was. And therefore the apostle to the Hebrews, when he says, that CHRIST *glorified not himself to be made an high-priest*, but was *appointed of GOD to this office, as was Araon*, Heb. v. 5. does hereby seem to intimate, that it was a glory to the Son of GOD to be an high-priest for the sons of men: for though it was a strange condescension, yet was it likewise a most wonderful argument of his goodness, which is the highest glory of the divine nature.

In short, if GOD for our sakes did submit himself to a condition which we may think did less become him, here is great cause of thankfulness, but none surely of cavil and exception: we have infinite reason to acknowledge and admire his goodness, but none at all to upbraid him with his kindness, and to quarrel with him for having condescended so much beneath himself to testify his love to us, and his tender concernment for our happiness: besides, that when we have said all we can about this matter, I hope we will allow GOD himself to be the best and most competent judge what is fit for GOD to do; and that he needs not take counsel of any of his creatures, what will best become him in this or any other case: *Behold in this thou art not just; I will answer thee, that GOD is greater than man: Why dost thou dispute against him? For he giveth not account of any of his matters.* Job xxxiii. 12, 13.

Thirdly, if our reason could get over this difficulty, and admit that GOD might become man; yet it seems very unsuitable to the Son of GOD, and to his great design of instructing and reforming mankind, to appear in so low and suffering a condition. This, to the heathen philosophers, who, as the apostle tells us, *by wisdom knew not GOD*, did not only seem unreasonable, but even ridiculous: so St. Paul tells us, *we*, says he, *preach CHRIST crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to*

the Greeks foolishness: 1 Cor. i. 21. to think that so poor and mean a man was fit to give laws to mankind, and to awe the minds of men by the authority of his doctrine: that one who was put to death himself should be believed by others when he promised to them life and immortality in another world, could not but appear very strange and unreasonable.

For answer to this; besides other excellent reasons and ends which the scripture expressly assigns of our blessed SAVIOUR's humiliation, in his assuming our nature with the frailties and miseries of it: as that he might be a teacher, and an example to us: that by his bitter passion he might make expiation for sin, and set us a pattern of the greatest meekness and patience under the greatest provocations and sufferings: that having suffered so grievously himself, he might know how to commiserate and pity us in all our temptations and sufferings: that *by death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage*: I say, besides all this, it was of great use that the great teacher and reformer of mankind should live in so mean and afflicted a condition, to confront the pride and vanity of the world by this consideration, that the Son of God, and the very best man that ever was, was a beggar, and *had not where to lay his head*: and likewise to convince men of these two great truths, that God may grievously afflict those whom he dearly loves; and that it is possible for men to be innocent and contented in the midst of poverty and reproach, and sufferings.

Had our blessed SAVIOUR appeared in the person and pomp of a great temporal prince, the influence of his authority and example would probably have made more hypocrites and servile converts, but not have persuaded men one jot more to be inwardly holy and good. The great arguments that must do that, must not be fetched from the pomp and prosperity of this world, but from the great and eternal recompences of the other.

And it is very well worth our observation, that nothing puzzled Cæsar Vaninus, who was perhaps the first, and the only martyr for atheism that ever was; I say, nothing puzzled him more, than that he could not from the history of our SAVIOUR's life and actions, written by the evangelists with so native a simplicity, fasten upon him any probable imputation of a secular interest and design in any thing that he said or did. No doubt but Vaninus, before he made this acknowledgment, had searched very narrowly into this matter; and could he have found any colour for such an imputation, he would have thought it sufficient to have blasted both him and his religion.

You may be pleased to consider farther, that it was the opinion of the wisest Jews, that the best men, the children of God who called God their father, were many times exposed to the greatest sufferings and reproaches for the trial of their faith, and meekness, and patience, as we may see at large in the Wisdom of Solomon, where speaking of the malice and enmity of the wicked to one that was eminently righteous, he brings them in saying after this manner, chap. ii. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20. *Let us lie in wait for the righteous, because he is not for our turn; he is clean contrary to our doings: he upbraideth us with our offending the law, and objecteth to our infamy the transgressions of our youth: he professeth to have the knowledge of God, and calleth himself the child of the LORD: he is grievous unto us even to behold; for his life is not like other mens, his ways are of another fashion: we are esteemed of him as counterfeits, he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness: he pronounceth the end of the just to be blessed, and maketh his boast that God is his father: let us see if his words be true, and what shall happen in the end of him: for if the just man be the Son of God, he will help him, and deliver him from the hands of his enemies: let us examine him with deceitfulness and torture, that we may know his meekness and prove his patience: let us condemn him to a shameful death, &c.*

This is so exact a character of our blessed SAVIOUR, both in respect of the holiness and innocency of his life, and of the reproaches and sufferings which he met with from the wicked and malicious Jews, who persecuted him all his life, and at last conspired his death, that whoever reads this passage can hardly forbear to think it a prophetic description of the innocency and sufferings of the blessed JESUS: for he certainly in the most eminent manner was the SON OF GOD, being called by the evangelist, *the only begotten of the Father*.

Or if this was not a prediction concerning our blessed SAVIOUR, yet thus much at least may be concluded from it, that in the judgment of the wisest among the Jews, it was not unworthy of the goodness and wisdom of the divine providence to permit the best man to be so ill treated by wicked men: and farther, that in their judgment the innocency and virtues of an eminently righteous man are then set off to the best advantage, and do shine forth with the greatest lustre, when he is under the hardest circumstances of suffering and persecution from an evil world.

Add to this likewise, that the best and wisest of the heathen philosophers do frequently inculcate such doctrines as these: that worldly greatness and power are not to be admired, but rather to be despised by a wise man: that men may be very good and dear to the gods, and yet liable to the greatest miseries and sufferings in this world. That whoever suffers unjustly, and bears it patiently, gives the greatest testimony to goodness, and does most effectually recommend piety and virtue, as things of greater value than the ease and pleasure of this present life: nay farther, that a good man cast into the hardest circumstances of poverty and misery, of reproach and suffering, is the fittest person of all other to be the minister, and apostle and preacher of GOD to mankind; which are the very words of Arian a heathen philosopher, in his discourses of Epictetus. Now surely they who say such things, have no reason to object to our blessed SAVIOUR his

low and suffering condition, as misbecoming one that was to be the great teacher and reformer of the world.

And as to that part of the objection, that he who so freely promised immortality to others could not, or however did not save himself from death. This vanisheth into nothing when we consider, that he rescued himself from the power of the grave: and it is so far from being ridiculous to rely upon his promise of raising us up from the dead, that the objection itself is really so. For can any thing be more reasonable, than to rely upon him for our hopes of immortality, who by rising from the grave himself, and by conquering the powers of death and darkness, and triumphing openly over them by his visible ascension into heaven, hath given so plain and sensible a demonstration to all mankind that he is able to make good to the uttermost all the glorious promises which he hath made to us of a blessed resurrection to eternal life and happiness in another world? To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.



S E R M O N XLVI.

Concerning the incarnation of CHRIST.

Preached in the church of St. Lawrence-
Jury, December 28, 1680.

JOHN i. 14.

The Word was made flesh.

THE third and last thing which I propos'd upon this argument of the incarnation of the Son of God was, to give some account of this dispensation, and to shew that the wisdom of God thought fit thus to order things, in great condescension to the weakness and common prejudices of mankind: and that when all things are duly weigh'd and consider'd, it will appear much more for our comfort and advantage, than any other way which the wisdom of men would have been most apt to devise and pitch upon.

And it is the more necessary to give some account of this matter, because after all that hath hitherto been said in answer to the objections against it, it may still seem very strange to a considering man that GOD, who could without all this circumstance and condescension, have done the business for which his Son came into the world and appeared in our nature, that is, could have given the same laws to mankind, and have offer'd to us the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life upon our repentance for sins past, and a sincere endeavour of obedience for the future: I say, that notwithstanding this, he should yet make choice of this way for the redemption and recovery of fallen man, by sending his Son in our nature to accomplish this design.

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And in the handling of this argument I shall, as I said before, all along take the express declarations, or at least the pregnant intimations of scripture for my ground and guide : it being always safest to take the reasons of the divine counsels and actions from God himself : and in the

First place, I make no manner of doubt to say, that it would be a great presumption and boldness in any man to affirm, that the infinite wisdom of God could not have brought about the salvation of men by any other way, than by this very way in which he hath done it. For why should we take upon us to set limits to infinite wisdom, and pretend to know the utmost extent of it ? But since God hath been pleased to pitch upon this way rather than any other, this surely ought to be reason enough to satisfy us of the peculiar wisdom and fitness of it, whether the particular reasons of it appear to us or not.

And yet it cannot be denied to be a very noble argument, and well worthy our consideration, to enquire into the reasons of this dispensation, and to assign them particularly, if we can. For I look upon mysteries and miracles in religion to be much of the same nature, and that a great reverence is due to both where they are certain, and necessary in the nature and reason of the thing : but neither of them are easily to be admitted without necessity, and very good evidence.

Secondly, I consider in the next place, that in the several revelations which God hath made of himself to mankind, he hath with great condescension accommodated himself, both as to the manner and degree of them, to the condition and capacity, and other circumstances of the persons and people to whom they were made.

Particularly we find, that the dispensation of God towards the Jewish nation was full of condescension to the temper, and prejudices, and other circumstances of that people. For the religion and laws which God gave them were far from being the best and most perfect in themselves ; in which sense some understand that passage in the prophet Ezekiel, where it is said that God gave them statutes which were not good, that is, very imperfect in com-

comparison of what he could and would have given them, had they been capable of them; and yet such as were very well suited and fitted to their present capacity and circumstances.

Thirdly, I observe yet farther; that though the Christian religion, as to the main and substance of it, be a most perfect institution, being the law of nature revived and perfected; yet upon a due consideration of things it cannot be denied, that the manner and circumstances of this dispensation are full of condescension to the weakness of mankind, and very much accommodated to the most common and deeply radicated prejudices of men concerning *G O D* and religion; and peculiarly fitted to remove and root them out of the minds of men, by substituting something in the place of them, of as near a compliance with them as was consistent with the honour of Almighty *G O D*, and the great design of the Christian religion.

It is not easy to give a certain account of the true original of some notions and prejudices concerning *G O D* and religion, which have generally obtained in the world, in that variety of religions, and the different ways of worship and superstition, which have been in several nations of the earth: but in history and fact this is certain, that some notions, and those very gross and erroneous, did almost universally prevail even among those who did extremely differ in the particular forms and modes of their superstition.

And though some of these were much more tolerable than others, yet *G O D* seems to have had great consideration of some very weak and gross apprehensions of mankind concerning religion. And, as in some of the laws given by Moses, *G O D* was pleased particularly to consider the hardness of the hearts of that people; so he seems likewise to have very much suited the dispensation of the gospel and the method of our salvation, by the incarnation and sufferings of his Son, to the common prejudices of mankind; especially of the heathen world, whose minds were less prepared for this dispensation than the Jews, if we consider the light and advantages which the

Jewish nation had above the Gentile world: so that by this means and method he might wean them by degrees from their gross conceptions of things, and rectify more easily their wrong apprehensions, by gratifying them in some measure, and in a gracious compliance with our weakness, by bending and accommodating the way and method of our salvation, to our weak capacity and imperfect conceptions of things.

Fourthly, and that GOD hath done this in the dispensation of the gospel, will I think very plainly appear in the following instances; in most of which I shall be very brief, and only insist somewhat more largely upon the last of them.

1st, The world was much given to admire mysteries in religion. The Jews had theirs; several of which by GOD's own appointment were reserved and kept secret in a great measure from the people; others were added by the superstition of after-ages, and held in equal or rather greater veneration than the former: and the heathen likewise had theirs; the devil always affecting to imitate GOD, so far as served his wicked and malicious design of seducing mankind into idolatry and the worship of himself: and therefore the scripture always speaks of the heathen idolatry as the worship of devils, and not of GOD: so that almost every nation had their peculiar and celebrated mysteries; most of which were either very odd and phantastical, or very lewd and impure, or very inhuman and cruel, and every way unworthy of the deity.

But the great mystery of the Christian religion, the incarnation of the Son of GOD; or, as the apostle calls it, GOD manifested in the flesh; was such a mystery, as for the greatness and wonderfulness, for the infinite mercy and condescension of it, did obscure and swallow up all other mysteries. For which reason the apostle, in allusion to the heathen mysteries and in contempt of them, speaking of the great mystery of the Christian religion, 1 Tim. iii. 16. *without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, GOD was manifested in the flesh, &c.* Since the world had such an admiration for mysteries, he in-

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stanceth in that which was a mystery indeed ; a mystery beyond all dispute, and beyond all comparison.

2dly, There was likewise a great inclination in mankind to the worship of a visible and sensible deity : and this was a main root and source of the various idolatries in the heathen world. Now to take men off from this, GOD was pleased to appear in our nature ; that they who were so fond of a visible deity might have one to whom they might pay divine worship without danger of idolatry, and without injury to the divine nature : even a true and natural image of GOD the Father, the fountain of the deity ; or, as the apostle to the Hebrews describes the Son of GOD, the resplendency or *brightness of his Father's glory, and the express character or image of his person.*

3dly, Another notion, which had generally obtained among mankind, was concerning the expiation of the sins of men, and appeasing the offended deity by sacrifice, upon which they supposed the punishment due to the sinner was transfer'd, to exempt him from it : especially by the sacrifices of men, which had almost universally prevailed in the Gentile world.

And this notion, of the expiation of sin by sacrifices of one kind or other, seems to have obtained very early in the world, and among all other ways of divine worship to have found the most universal reception in all times and places. And indeed a great part of the Jewish religion and worship was a plain condescension to the general apprehensions of men concerning this way of appeasing the deity by sacrifice : and the greatest part of the Pagan religion and worship was likewise founded upon the same notion and opinion, which because it was so universal, seems to have had its original from the first parents of mankind either immediately after the creation, or after the flood and from thence, I mean as to the substance of this notion, to have been derived and propagated to all their posterity.

And with this general notion of mankind, whatever the ground and foundation of it might be, GOD was pleased so far to comply as once for all to have a general

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atonement made for the sins of all mankind by the sacrifice of his only Son, whom his wise providence did permit by wicked hands to be crucified and slain. But I shall not at present insist any farther upon this; which requires a particular discourse by itself, and may by G O D's assistance in due time have it.

4thly, Another very common notion and very rise in the heathen world, and a great source of their idolatry, was their apotheosis or canonizing of famous and eminent persons, who in their life-time had done great things, and some way or other been great benefactors to mankind, by advancing them after their death to the dignity of an inferior kind of gods fit to be worshipped by men here on earth, and to have their prayers and supplications addressed to them as proper and powerful mediators and intercessors for them with the superior gods: to these they gave the titles of heroes and semidei, that is, half-gods; though the notion of a being that is just half-infinite seems to me very hard to be conceived and defined.

Now to take men off from this kind of idolatry, and to put an end to it, behold one in our *nature exalted to the right-hand of the majesty on high*, to be worshipped by men and angels: one that was the truly great benefactor of mankind: one that *was dead, and is alive again, and lives for evermore, to make intercession for*

5thly, To give but one instance more, which I have already intimated; the world was mightily bent upon addressing their requests and supplications, not to the deity immediately, because their superstition thought that too great a presumption, but by some mediators between the gods and them, who might with advantage in this humble manner present their requests so as to find acceptance. To this end they made use of the dæmons or angels, and of their heroes, or deified men whom I mentioned before, by whom they put up their prayers to the supreme gods, hoping by their intercession, and patronage of their cause, to obtain a gracious answer of them.

In a gracious compliance with this common apprehension, and thereby more easily and effectually to extirpate this sort of idolatry, which had been so long, and so generally practised in the world, GOD was pleased to constitute and appoint one in our nature to be a perpetual advocate and intercessor in heaven for us, to offer up our prayers to GOD his Father, and to obtain *mercy for us, and grace to help in time of need.*

And for ever to take us off from all other mediators, we are expressly told in scripture, that as there is but one GOD to whom we are to pray, so there is but *one mediator between GOD and men, the man CHRIST JESUS,* 1 Tim. ii. 5. by whom we are to offer up our prayers to GOD: and that we need not look out for any other, since the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, Heb. vii. 25. *that he is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to GOD by him, seeing he lives for ever to make intercession for us.*

And for this reason the church of Rome is altogether inexcusable in this point, for introducing more mediators and intercessors, more patrons and advocates in heaven for us: and this not only without any necessity, for who can add any virtue and efficacy to the powerful and prevalent intercession of the Son of GOD? But likewise in direct contradiction to the express constitution and appointment of GOD himself, who says there is *but one mediator between GOD and man,* and they say there ought to be many more, not only the blessed virgin, but all the saints and angels in heaven. Besides, that by this very thing they revive one notorious piece of the old pagan idolatry, which GOD so plainly designed to extinguish by appointing *one only mediator between GOD and men.*

By this condescension likewise GOD hath given us the comfortable assurance of a most powerful and a perpetual intercessor at *the right hand of GOD* in our behalf. For if we consider CHRIST as a man and of the same nature with us, *bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,* so very nearly allied and related to us, we may easily believe that he hath a most tender care and concern

ment for us: that he sincerely wisheth our happiness, and will by all means seek to procure it, if we ourselves by our own wilful obstinacy do not hinder it, and resist the kindness and the counsel of GOD against ourselves: for if we be resolved to continue impenitent, there is no help for us; we must die in our sins, and salvation itself cannot save us.

But to proceed; it cannot surely but be matter of greatest consolation to us, that *the man* CHRIST JESUS who is now so *highly exalted at the right hand of GOD*, and who hath *all power in heaven and earth committed to him*, is our patron and advocate in heaven to plead our cause with GOD: since we cannot but think, that he who was pleased to become brother to us all does bear a true affection and good will to us: and that he, who assumed our nature, will heartily espouse our cause, and plead it powerfully for us; and will with all possible advantage recommend our petitions and requests to GOD.

But then if we consider farther, that he did not only take our nature, but likewise took our infirmities and bore them many years, in which he had long and continual experience of the saddest sufferings to which human nature is subject in this world, and *was tempted in all things like as we are*: this gives us still greater assurance that he who suffered and was tempted himself, cannot but be touched with a lively sense of our infirmities, and must have learned by his own sufferings to compassionate ours, and to be ready to succour us when we are tempted, and to afford us grace and help suitable to all our wants and infirmities: for nothing gives us so just a sense of the sufferings of others, as the remembrance of our own, and the bitter experience of the like sufferings and temptations in ourselves.

And this the apostle to the Hebrews doth very particularly insist upon as matter of greatest comfort and encouragement to us, that the Son of GOD did not only assume our nature, but *was made in all things like unto us*, and during his abode here upon earth, did suffer and *was tempted like as we are*: for verily, says the apostle, Heb. 16, 17, 18. *he took not on him the nature of angels,*

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*but the seed of Abraham: wherefore in all things it be-
hoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might
be a merciful and faithful high-priest in things pertaining
to GOD: for in that he himself suffered being tempted, he
is able to succour them that are tempted.*

And again, exhorting the Jews who were newly converted to Christianity to continue stedfast in their profession, notwithstanding all the sufferings to which upon that account they were exposed; he comforts them with this consideration, that we have at the right hand of GOD so powerful an advocate and intercessor for us as the Son of GOD, who is sensible of our case, having suffered the same things himself, and therefore we cannot doubt of his compassion to us, and readiness to support us in the like sufferings: *seeing then, says he, Heb. iv. 14, 15, 16. that we have a great high-priest that is passed into the heavens, JESUS the Son of GOD, let us hold fast our profession: for we have not an high-priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin: from whence he concludes, that having such an intercessor we may with great confidence and assurance address our supplications to GOD for his mercy and help in all our wants and weakness, to supply the one, and to assist the other: let us therefore, says he, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need, χαρειν εις εναντιον βοηθεων, grace for seasonable relief.*

So that our blessed SAVIOUR and Redeemer, now that he is advanced to heaven and exalted to the right-hand of GOD, is not unmindful of us in this height of his glory and greatness; but with the tenderest affection and compassion to mankind doth still prosecute the design of our salvation; and in virtue of his meritorious obedience and sufferings, which he presents to GOD continually, he offers up our prayers to him, and pleads our cause with him, and represents to him all our wants and necessities, and procures for us a favourable answer of our prayers, and supplies of grace and strength proportionable to our temptations and infirmities.

And thus, by virtue of this prevalent intercession of his with GOD for us, our sins are forgiven, and our wants supplied, and our requests granted, and the gracious assistance and supports of GOD's Holy Spirit are seasonably afforded to us, and we are *kept by the mighty power of GOD through faith unto salvation*: in a word, all those blessings and benefits are procured for us by his intercession in heaven, which he purchased for us by his blood upon earth.

So that in this method of our salvation, besides many other gracious condescensions which GOD hath made to the weakness and prejudices of mankind, our blessed SAVIOUR hath perfectly supplied the two great wants concerning which mankind was at so great a loss before, namely the want of an effectual expiatory sacrifice for sin upon earth, and of a prevalent mediator and intercessor with GOD in heaven.

And he hath, in great goodness and condescension to our inveterate prejudices concerning these things, taken effectual care fully to supply both these wants; having *appeared in the end of the world, to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself*; and in virtue of that sacrifice appearing now in heaven in the presence of GOD for us, he is become our perpetual advocate, and a most prevalent intercessor with GOD in our behalf.

For instead of the various and endless sacrifices of the Jews and heathens, the Son of GOD hath *by one sacrifice for sins perfected for ever them that are sanctified*: and instead of the mediation of dæmons and heroes, to offer up our prayers to GOD, which were the intercessors made use of among the heathen, we have *one mediator between GOD and men*, appointed by GOD himself, even *the Son of GOD, who is entred into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of GOD for us*: and to assure us that he commiserates our case, and hath a true and tender sense of our infirmities and sufferings, the very manner of his intercession for us, as the scripture represents to us, is a plain demonstration of the thing: for he intercedes for us in heaven, by representing to GOD his other his sufferings upon earth, and pleading them in our behalf;

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behalf: so that the very argument which he useth to GOD for us, cannot but stir up compassion in him towards us, and whilst he represents his own sufferings in our behalf, we cannot think that he is unmindful and insensible of ours.

You see then that in this dispensation of GOD for our salvation, by sending his Son in our nature, things that are not only suited in great condescension to our apprehensions, but are likewise in great compassion to us every way fitted for our comfort and encouragement. GOD hath made him our great patron and advocate, who was our sacrifice and propitiation. And surely we have all the reason in the world to believe, that he, who in the days of his flesh humbled himself, and became obedient to the death for our sakes, will be ready to do us all good offices now that he is advanced to the right hand of GOD; that he who died for us upon earth, now that he lives again will make intercession for us in heaven, and perfect that salvation which he purchased for us upon the cross.

And therefore we find in scripture, that as the purchasing of our salvation is ascribed to the death and sufferings of CHRIST, so the perfecting of it is attributed to his intercession for us at the right hand of his Father: *Wherefore*, says the apostle to the Hebrews, *he is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to GOD by him, seeing he liveth for ever to make intercession for us*: he died once to purchase these benefits, but he lives for ever to procure them for us, and to apply them to us: and now that he is in heaven, he is as intent upon our concerns, and lays our happiness as much to heart as when he dwelt here among us on earth, and poured out his blood a sacrifice for sin upon the cross: and that when he lived here below, he suffered and was tempted as we are; this very consideration gives us the greatest assurance possible, that he is still touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and hath a lively sense of our sufferings; and consequently, that he doth compassionate our case, and will use all his power and interest for our advantage, for our seasonable support and succour in all our trials and

sufferings. But besides the wonderful condescension of this dispensation, there is likewise in the

Fifth and last place, a great congruity and fitness in the thing itself; and this method of our salvation which the wisdom of GOD hath pitched upon, is in many other respects very much for our real benefit and comfort. For by this means we have a perfect and familiar example of holiness and obedience in our own nature, by which we plainly see that GOD requires nothing of us, but what he himself when he submitted to become man did think fit to do: for *being made of a woman*, he was of necessity *made under the law*, and by assuming human nature, he became naturally subject to the laws and conditions of his being.

And here likewise is a provision made for the expiation and forgiveness of our sins, in a way not only very honourable to the justice of GOD and the authority of his laws, but likewise very effectual to discountenance sin and to deter men from it; since GOD did not think fit to forgive the sins of men without great sufferings, and that in our nature: for though GOD was willing to save the sinner, yet rather than encouragement should be given to sin by letting it go unpunished, he was contented to give up the *dearly beloved of his soul to be a sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of the whole world*.

By the same means also we have a most powerful antidote against the fear of suffering, and particularly against the fear of death, one of the greatest slaveries of human nature: so also the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, Heb. ii. 14, 15. *that for this cause CHRIST himself also took part of flesh and blood, that by death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*.

Again, we have hereby full assurance of a blessed immortality in another life, because in our nature death and all the powers of darkness were baffled and overcome. The death of CHRIST, which could not have been without his incarnation, and likewise his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, are sensible demonstrations

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monstrations to all mankind of a blessed immortality after death; which is the most powerful motive in the world to obedience and a holy life.

And lastly, we may upon this account promise to ourselves a fair and equal trial at the judgment of the great day, because we shall then be judged by a man like ourselves. Our SAVIOUR and judge himself hath told us, John v. 22, 27. that for this reason GOD *hath committed all judgment to the Son, because he is the Son of man.* And this in human judgments is accounted a great privilege, to be judged by those who are of the same rank and condition with ourselves, and who are likely to understand best and most carefully to examine and consider all our circumstances, and to tender our case as if it were their own.

So equitably doth GOD deal with us, that we shall be acquitted or condemned by such a judge, as according to human measures we ourselves should have chosen; by one in our own nature *who was made in all things like unto us*, that only excepted which would have rendered him incapable of being our judge, because it would have made him a criminal like ourselves. And therefore the apostle offers this as a firm ground of assurance to us that GOD *will judge the world in righteousness*, because this judgment shall be administered by a man like ourselves; *he hath*, saith he, *appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, &c.*

I shall now only make a practical inference or two from what hath been delivered upon this argument, and so conclude this whole discourse.

First, The serious consideration of what hath been said concerning the incarnation of our blessed SAVIOUR, should effectually prevail with us to comply with the great end and design of the Son of GOD's becoming man and dwelling amongst us, and of his doing and suffering all those things, which are recorded of him in the history of his life and death, written by the holy evangelists: I say, the consideration hereof should persuade us all to comply with the great design of all this, which is the re-formation

formation of mankind, and the recovery of us out of that sinful and miserable estate into which we were fallen: because the salvation, which the Son of GOD hath purchased for us, and which he offers to us by the gospel, is not to be accomplished and brought about any other way than by our forsaking our sins and reforming our lives. *The grace of GOD which hath appeared to all men and brings salvation*, will not make us partakers of it in any other way, nor by any other means, than by *teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly and righteously, and godly in this present world.* GOD sent his Son JESUS to *bless us, by turning us away every one from his iniquities*; and unless this change be effectually wrought in us, we are utterly incapable of all the blessings of the gospel of CHRIST. All that he hath done for us without us will avail us nothing, unless we be inwardly transformed and *renewed in the spirit of our minds*; unless we become new creatures; unless we make it the continual and sincere endeavour of our lives to *keep the commandments of GOD.*

For the scripture is most express and positive in this matter; that *without holiness no man shall see the LORD*: Heb. xii. 14. that *every man that hath this hope in him, that is, in CHRIST to be saved by him, must purify himself even as he is pure.* 1 John iii. 3. We do not rightly and truly believe that JESUS CHRIST came into the world to save sinners, if we be not also thoroughly convinced, that it is as necessary for us to leave our sins, as to believe this most faithful and credible saying.

The obedience and sufferings of our blessed SAVIOUR are indeed accounted to us for righteousness, and will most certainly redound to our unspeakable benefit and advantage upon our performance of the condition which the gospel both require on our part, namely, that *every man that comes the name of CHRIST depart from iniquity*: and the grace of GOD's holy Spirit is ready to enable us to perform this condition, if we earnestly ask it, and do sincerely co-operate with it: provided we do what we can on our part, GOD will not be wanting to us on his. *But if we receive the grace of GOD in vain, and take no care*

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care to perform the condition, and do neglect to implore the grace and assistance of GOD's Holy Spirit to that purpose, we have none to blame but ourselves; because it is then wholly our own fault if we fall short of that happiness which CHRIST hath purchased, and promised to us upon such easy and reasonable conditions as the gospel proposeth.

But I no where find that GOD hath promised to force happiness upon the negligent, and a reward upon the *wicked and slothful servant*: a gift may be given for nothing, but surely a reward does in the very nature of it always suppose some service. None but a righteous man is capable of a righteous man's reward: and St. John hath sufficiently cautioned us not to think ourselves righteous unless we be *doers of righteousness*: *little children*, says he, 1 John iii. 7. *let no man deceive you, he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.* This is so very plain a text, that if men were not either very easy to be deceived by others, or very willing to deceive themselves, they could not possibly mistake the meaning of it: and therefore I will repeat it once more, *little children, let no man deceive you; he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.*

Secondly, the other inference which I would make from the precedent discourse is this, that with all possible thankfulness we should acknowledge and adore the wonderful goodness and condescension of Almighty GOD in sending his only begotten Son into the world in our nature, to be *made flesh*, and to *dwell amongst us* in order to our recovery and salvation: a method and dispensation not only full of mercy and goodness, but of great condescension to our meanness, and of mighty virtue and efficacy for our redemption and deliverance from the guilt and dominion of sin; and upon all accounts every way so much for our benefit and advantage. So that well may we say with St. Paul, *this is a faithful saying, $\omega\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$* , a credible word, and *worthy of all acceptance*, that is, fit to be embraced and entertained with all possible joy and thankfulness, *that JESUS CHRIST came into the world to save sinners.*

What

What an everlasting fountain of the most invaluable blessings and benefits to mankind is the incarnation of the Son of GOD? His vouchsafing to assume our nature, and to reside and converse so long with us? And what are we, that the eternal and only begotten Son of GOD should condescend to do all this for us? That the high and glorious majesty of heaven should stoop down to the earth, and be contented to be clothed with misery and mortality? That he should submit to so poor and low a condition, to such dreadful and disgraceful sufferings for our sakes? For what are we? Vile and despicable creatures, guilty and unworthy, offenders and apostates, enemies and rebels. Blessed GOD! how great is thy goodness? How infinite are thy tender mercies and compassions to mankind? That thou shouldst regard us whilst we neglected thee, and remember us in our low condition, when we had *forgotten thee days without number*; and shouldst take such pity on us when we shewed none to ourselves; and whilst we were thy declared and implacable enemies, shouldst express more kindness and goodwill to us, than the best of men ever did to their best friends.

When we reflect seriously upon those great things which GOD hath done in our behalf, and consider that mighty salvation which GOD hath wrought for us; what thanks can we possibly render, what acknowledgments shall we ever be able to make, I do not say equal, but in any wise meet and becoming, to this great benefactor of mankind? Who, when we had so highly offended and provoked him, and so foolishly and so fatally undone ourselves; when we were become so guilty and so miserable, and so much fitter to have eternally been the objects of his wrath and indignation than of his pity and compassion, was pleased to send his own, his only Son into the world to seek and save us; and by him to repair all our ruins, to *forgive all our iniquities, to heal all our spiritual diseases, and to crown us with loving-kindness and tender mercies.*

And what sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving should we also offer up to this gracious and most merciful redeemer

deemer

What

deemer of ours, the everlasting Son of the Father, who debased himself so infinitely for our sakes, and *when he took upon him to deliver man did not abhor the virgin's womb*: who was contented to be born so obscurely, and to live all his life in a poor and persecuted condition; and was pleased both to undergo and to *overcome the sharpness of death, that he might open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.*

Every time we have occasion to meditate upon this, especially when we are communicating at his holy table, and receiving the blessed symbols and pledges of his precious death and passion: how should *our hearts burn within us* and leap for joy? How should the remembrance of it revive and raise our spirits, and put us into an ecstasy of love and gratitude, to this great friend and lover of souls: and with the blessed mother of our LORD, how should our souls, upon that blessed occasion, *magnify the LORD, and our spirits rejoice in GOD our SAVIOUR?*

The holy men of old were transported with joy, at the obscure and confused apprehension, and remote foresight of so great a blessing, at so great a distance: it is said of *Abraham the father of the faithful, that he saw his day afar off and was glad*: how should we then be affected with joy and thankfulness, to whom the Son of GOD and blessed SAVIOUR of men is actually come? He is come many ages ago, and hath enlightned a great part of the world with his glory. Yea, he is come to us, who were in a manner separated from the rest of the world: to us is this great light come, who had so long *sat in darkness and in the shadow of death*: and this mighty salvation which he hath wrought for us, is near to every one of us that is willing to lay hold of it, and to accept upon those gracious terms and conditions, upon which it is offered to us in his holy gospel.

And by his coming, he hath delivered mankind from that gross ignorance and *thick darkness which covered the nations*: and we know that the Son of GOD is come, and hath given us an understanding to know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son JESUS

CHRIST: *this is the true GOD, and eternal life*, 1 John v. 20. And then it immediately follows, ver. 21. *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.* What can be the meaning of this caution? And what is the connexion of it with the foregoing discourse? It is plainly this: that the Son of GOD by his coming had rescued mankind from the sottish worship of idols; and therefore he cautions Christians to take great heed of relapsing into idolatry by worshipping a creature, or the image and likeness of any creature instead of GOD. And because he foresaw that it might be objected to Christians, as in fact it was afterwards by the heathen, that the worship of CHRIST, who was a man, was as much idolatry as that which the Christians charged the heathen withal: therefore St. John effectually to prevent the force of this plausible objection, though he perpetually, throughout his gospel, declares CHRIST to be really a man, yet he expressly also affirms him to be GOD, and the true GOD; and consequently, Christians might safely pay divine worship to him without fear or danger of idolatry: *We are in him that is true, even in his Son JESUS CHRIST: this is the true GOD, and eternal life: little children, keep yourselves from idols.*

But this I am sensible is a digression, yet such a one as may not be altogether useless.

To proceed then in the recital of those great blessings, which the coming of the Son of GOD hath brought to mankind. He hath rescued us from the bondage of sin, and from the slavery of Satan: he hath openly proclaimed pardon and reconciliation to the world: he hath clearly revealed eternal life to us, which was but obscurely made known before, both to Jews and Gentiles; *but now made manifest by the appearance of our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel*: he hath purchased this great blessing for us; and is ready to confer it upon us, if we will be contented to leave our sins and to be saved by him: a condition without which as salvation is not to be had, so it

it were, it would not be desirable, it could not make us happy; because our sins would still separate between God and us, and the guilt and horror of our own minds would make us eternally miserable.

And now surely we cannot but thus judge, that all the praises and acknowledgments, all the service and obedience, which we can possibly render to him, are infinitely beneath those infinite obligations which the Son of God hath laid upon the sons of men, by his coming into the world to save sinners.

What then remains, but that at all times, and more especially at this season, we gratefully acknowledge and joyfully commemorate this great and amazing goodness of God to us, in the incarnation of his Son for the redemption and salvation of the sinful and miserable race of mankind? A method and dispensation of the divine grace and wisdom, not only full of mercy and condescension, but of great power and virtue to purify our hearts and to reform our lives; to beget in us a fervent love of God our SAVIOUR, and a perfect hatred and detestation of our sins, and a stedfast purpose and resolution to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking in his ways all the days of our life. In a word, a method that is every way calculated for our unspeakable benefit and comfort.

Since then the Son of God hath so graciously condescended to be *made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted*; let us aspire to be as like to him as is possible in the exemplary holiness and virtues of his life. We cannot be like him in his miracles, but we may in his mercy and compassion: we cannot imitate his divine power, but we may resemble him in his innocency and humility, in his meekness and patience. And as he assumed human nature, so let us re-assume humanity, which we have in great measure depraved and put off; and let us *put on bowels of mercy* towards those that are in misery, and be ready to relieve the poor for his sake, *who being rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.*

To conclude, let us imitate him in that which was his great work and business here upon earth, and which of all other did best become the Son of God; I mean in his *going about doing good*: that by giving glory to God in the highest, and by endeavouring as much as in us lies to procure and promote *peace on earth, and good will amongst men*, we may at last be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: through the mercies and merits of our blessed SAVIOUR and Redeemer. Amen.

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one GOD, world without end, Amen.



S E R M O N XLVII.

Concerning the Sacrifice and Satisfaction of CHRIST, &c.

H E B. ix. 26.

But now once hath he appeared in the end of the world, to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

AMONG many other great ends and reasons, for which GOD was pleased to send his Son into the world to dwell amongst us, this was one of the chief, that by a long course of the greatest innocency and the greatest sufferings in our nature, he might be capable to make a perfect expiation of sin: *but now once in the end of the world, ἐν συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων* in the conclusion of the ages, that is in the last age of the world, which is the gospel age, *hath he appeared to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

The general design of GOD in sending his Son into the world, was to save mankind from eternal death and misery, and to purchase for us eternal life and happiness. So the author of our salvation himself tells us, John 3. 16. *that GOD so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Now in order to the procuring of this salvation from the impediments and hindrances of it were to be removed: these were the guilt and dominion of sin: by the guilt of sin we were become obnoxious to the wrath of GOD and to eternal condemnation; and by the dominion and dominion of it, we were incapable of the happiness of heaven and the reward of eternal life.

To remove these two great hindrances two things were necessary : the forgiveness of sins past, in order to our deliverance from the wrath of God and the eternal torments of the next life ; and the reformation of our hearts and lives, to make us capable of eternal life and happiness in another world. And both these, if God had so pleased, might, for any thing we certainly know to the contrary, have been effected by the abundant mercy and powerful grace of God, without this wonderful method and dispensation of sending his Son in our nature *to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself* : but it seems the wisdom of God thought fit to pitch upon this way and method of our salvation, and no doubt for very good reasons ; amongst which these three seem to be very obvious and very considerable.

First, to vindicate the honour of his laws, which, if sin had gone altogether unpunished, would have been in great danger of falling into contempt. For if God had proclaimed a general pardon of sin to all mankind, without any testimony of his wrath and displeasure against it, who would have had any great veneration for his laws, or have believed in good earnest, that the violation of them had either been so extremely offensive to him, or so very dangerous to the sinner ?

Therefore to maintain the honour of his laws, rather than sin should pass unpunished, God would lay the punishment of it upon his only begotten Son, the dearest person to him in the world : which is a greater testimony of his high displeasure against sin, and of his tender regard and concernment for the honour of his laws, than if the sinner had suffered the punishment due to it in his own person.

Secondly, another reason of this dispensation, and at likewise very considerable, was, that God might give sin in such a way as yet effectually to discountenance and discourage it, and to create in us the greatest terror and hatred of it : which could not have been by absolute pardon, without any punishment inflicted, or satisfaction made to the honour of his justice. For had

sin been so easily forgiven, who would have been sensible of the great evil of it, or afraid to offend for the future?

But when God makes his own Son a sacrifice, and lays upon him the punishment due for the iniquities of us all, this is the demonstration that God hates sin as much, if it be possible, as he loved his own Son. For this plainly shews what sin deserves, and what the sinner may justly expect, if after this severity of God against it he will venture to commit it.

And if this sacrifice for sin, and the pardon purchased by it, be not effectual to reclaim us from sin, and to bring in us an eternal dread and detestation of it: if we sin wilfully after so clear a revelation of the *wrath of God from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*, there remains *no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume the adversaries*. For what could God do more to testify his displeasure against sin, and to discountenance the practice of it, than to make his only Son an offering for sin, and to give him up to be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities? In what clearer glass can we at once behold the great evil and demerit of sin, and the infinite goodness and mercy of God to sinners, than in the sorrows and sufferings of the Son of God for our sins and for our sakes?

Thirdly, another reason of this dispensation seems to have been a gracious condescension and compliance of Almighty God with a certain apprehension and persuasion, which had very early and universally obtained among mankind, concerning the expiation of sin, and appeasing the offended deity by sacrifices; by the sacrifices of living creatures, of birds and beasts; and afterwards by human sacrifices and *the blood of their sons and daughters*: by offering to God, as the expression is in the prophet, *their first-born for their transgression, and the fruit of their body for the sin of their souls*.

And this notion of the expiation of sin by sacrifice whether it had its first rise from divine revelation, and

was afterwards propagated from age to age by tradition: I say, from whencesoever this notion came, it hath of all other notions concerning religion, excepting those of the being of God and his providence, and of the recompences of another life, found the most universal reception, and the thing hath been the most generally practised in all ages and nations, not only in the old, but in the new discovered parts of the world.

And indeed a very great part of the jewish religion, which was instituted by God himself, seems to have been a plain condescension to the general apprehension of mankind, concerning this way of appeasing the offended deity by sacrifices: as it was also a figure of that great and efficacious sacrifice, which should in due time be offered to God to make atonement once for all for the sins of all mankind.

And the apostle to the Hebrews doth very particularly insist upon this condescension of God to them, in the dispensation of the gospel: and whereas they apprehended so great a necessity of an high-priest and of sacrifices to make expiation for the sins of the people, that it was an established principle among them, that *without shedding of blood there was no remission of sins*: God was pleased to comply so far with these notions and apprehensions of theirs, as to make his own Son both a priest and a sacrifice, to do that once for all which their own high-priest pretended to do year by year.

And from hence the same apostle takes occasion to commend to them the new covenant and dispensation of the gospel, as having a greater and more perfect high-priest and a more excellent sacrifice, than were the high-priests and the sacrifices under the law; the Son of God having by one sacrifice of himself obtained eternal redemption for us, and perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

And this apprehension prevailed no less in the heathen world, and proceeded to the sacrifices of men, even of their first-born. And with this apprehension, not to countenance but to abolish it, God was pleased to comply

ply so far as to make a general atonement for the sins of mankind by the death of his Son, appearing in our nature to become a voluntary sacrifice for us: G O D permitting him to be unjustly put to death, and his blood to be shed by the malice of men, in appearance as a malefactor, but in truth as a martyr; and accepting of his death as a meritorious sacrifice and *propitiation for the sins of the whole world*: that by this wise counsel and permission of his providence he might for ever put an end to that barbarous and inhuman way of serving G O D, which had been so long in use and practice among them: the Son of G O D by the voluntary sacrifice of himself having effected all that at once, and for ever, which mankind from the beginning of the world had in vain been endeavouring to accomplish by innumerable and continual sacrifices; namely, the pardon of their sins, and perfect peace and reconciliation with G O D.

For these ends and reasons, and perhaps for many more as great and considerable as these, which our shallow understandings are not able to fathom, the wisdom of G O D hath pitched upon this way and method of delivering mankind from the guilt and dominion of sin by the sacrifice of his Son. And to this end it was requisite that he should appear in our nature, and dwell amongst us for some considerable time, that by a long course of the greatest innocency and of the greatest sufferings in our nature he might be capable of making a perfect expiation of sin.

So that two things were requisite to qualify him for this purpose; perfect innocency and obedience, and great sufferings in our nature, even to the suffering of death. Both these the scripture declares to be necessary qualifications of a person capable to make expiation of sin; and both these were found in the person of our blessed SAVIOUR.

First, unspotted innocency and perfect obedience. This the scripture testifies concerning him, and the whole course of his life and actions. *He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*, saith the apostle to the He-

brews,

brews, chap. iv. 15. *He always did the things which pleased GOD, as he testifies concerning himself, and we are sure that his witness is true.* John viii. 29. *He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth,* as St. Peter tells us of him, 1 Pet. ii. 15. And this was necessary to qualify him for the perfect expiation of sin, whether we consider him as a priest, or as a sacrifice.

As a priest, he could not have been fit to make expiation for the sins of others, had he not been without sin himself. And this, the apostle tells us, is one great advantage of our high-priest under the gospel, above the high-priest under the law, who being a sinner himself, as well as those for whom he offered, had need to offer for himself before he could make so much as a legal expiation for the sins of others: but a perfect and effectual expiation of sin, so as to purge the conscience from the guilt of it, cannot be made but by an high-priest who is holy and innocent himself; *For such an high-priest, saith the apostle, Heb. vii. 26, 27. became us, that is, now under the dispensation of the gospel, when a perfect expiation of sins is to be made, such an high-priest is necessary, as is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, who needs not as those high-priests, that is, as the high-priests under the law, to offer up sacrifice first for his own sins, and then for the people:* the plain force of which argument is this, that he, who will be qualified to make atonement for the sins of others, must be without sin himself.

And then if we consider CHRIST as a sacrifice for sin, perfect holiness is necessary to make a sacrifice acceptable and available for the expiation of sin. The necessity of this was typified by the quality of the expiatory sacrifices under the law: the beasts that were to be offered were to be *without spot and blemish*: to which the apostle alludes, speaking of the quality and efficacy of the sacrifice of CHRIST: *How much more, says he, Heb. ix. 14. shall the blood of CHRIST, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to GOD, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living GOD?* And to the same purpose St.

St. Peter, 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. *Forasmuch as ye know ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of CHRIST, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, &c.* hereby intimating, that nothing less than the perfect innocency and holiness of him who was to be a sacrifice for us could have expiated the guilt of our sins, and purchased eternal redemption for us.

Secondly, great sufferings likewise in our nature, even to the suffering of death, were requisite to the perfect expiation of sin: I say, even to the suffering of death. For the sacrifices which were to make expiation were to be slain. And it was a constant maxim and principle among the Jews, and the apostle more than once in this epistle seems to allow and confirm it, that *without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.*

Not that God could not have pardoned sin without satisfaction made to his justice, either by the suffering of the sinner himself, or of a sacrifice in his stead: but, according to the method and dispensation which the wisdom of God had pitched upon, he was resolved not to dispense forgiveness in any other way. For which reason he seems either to have possessed mankind with this principle, or to have permitted them to be so persuaded, that *sin was not to be expiated but by blood*, that is, either by the death of the sinner, or of the sacrifice.

Now the life of our blessed SAVIOUR, as well as his death, was made up of sufferings of one kind or other: continual sufferings from his cradle to his cross, from the time he drew his first breath, to his giving up the ghost: and not only continual sufferings, but the greatest that ever were, considering the dignity of the person that suffered, and the nature of the sufferings: considering likewise that these sufferings were not only wholly undeserved on his part, but unmerited also on ours, for whose sake he submitted himself to them: Nay, on the contrary, he had obliged to the utmost those for whom and by whom he suffered, and continued still to oblige them by the greatest blessings and benefits purchased and procured for them

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them by those very sufferings which with so much malice and cruelty they inflicted on him.

Had our blessed SAVIOUR been a mere man, the perfect innocency and unspotted purity of his whole life; his zeal to do the will of GOD, and his delight in doing it; his infinite pains and unwearied diligence in *going about doing good*: his constant obedience to GOD in the most difficult instances, and his perseverance in well-doing, notwithstanding the ill usage and hard measure, the bitter reproaches and persecutions he met withal for it, from a wicked and ill-natured world: his perfect submission to the will of GOD, his invincible patience under the greatest and bitterest sufferings, and his infinite charity to his enemies and persecutors: these must needs be highly acceptable to GOD, and, if man could merit of GOD, likely enough to be available for the sins of others.

But our SAVIOUR and our sacrifice being the Son of GOD in our nature; and he voluntarily assuming it, and submitting to the condition of humanity in its lowest and most miserable state, sin only excepted; and his being contented to live a life of doing good and suffering evil, and at last to be put to death and slain a sacrifice for us: the dignity of the person who did and suffered all this for us, and his dearneſs to GOD, must needs add a mighty value to so perfect an obedience and such patient sufferings; so as to render them a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

And all this being willingly performed in our nature, and accepted by GOD as done upon our account, may reasonably be presumed to redound to our benefit and advantage, as much as if we ourselves had performed it in our own persons: nothing being so proper and so available to make an honourable amends and satisfaction to the justice of GOD for the sins of all mankind, as the voluntary obedience and sufferings of human nature in a person of so great dignity and dearneſs to GOD as his eternal and dearly beloved Son.

Now that expiation of sin was made by the sufferings of CHRIST in our stead, I shall endeavour to make good, these three ways.

First, from plain testimonies of holy scripture, declaring this matter to us as clearly and fully as it is possible for words to do it.

Secondly, from the nature and intention of expiatory sacrifices, both among the Jews and heathen; to which the death of CHRIST is in the new testament so frequently compared, and in point of virtue and efficacy to take away sin infinitely preferred to it.

Thirdly, by vindicating this method and dispensation of the divine wisdom from the objections which are brought against it; and by shewing that there is nothing in it that is unreasonable, or any wise unworthy of GOD.

I. I shall produce some plain testimonies of holy scripture which declare this matter as clearly and fully as it is possible for words to do it; namely, that the Son of GOD, in order to the effectual expiation of sin, suffered in our stead, and bore the wrath of GOD for us, and made a perfect atonement for sin, and obtained eternal redemption for us.

This the scripture declares to us in great variety of expressions: as, that CHRIST *died for us*, and *for our sins*; that he was *a sacrifice for us*, and *a propitiation for the sins of the whole world*, that is, of all mankind; that he bore *our sins in his own body on the tree*, and appeared to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself; that *we are justified by his blood*, and *redeemed by the price of it*; and in very many other expressions to the same purpose.

And this is so evidently the scope and meaning of these expressions, that it cannot be denied without offering the greatest violence imaginable to the holy scriptures. Can any man think that GOD would have used so many expressions in scripture, the plain and most obvious sense of all which is, that the Son of GOD suffered for our sins and in our stead, if this had not been his design and meaning? Would not this be in effect to say, that GOD

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had written a great book to puzzle and confound, but not to instruct and teach mankind?

I will at present single out some few of those many texts of scripture, which might be produced to this purpose: 2 Cor. v. 21. *he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin*, that is, he had made him who had no sin himself a sacrifice for our sins. Again, Eph. v. 10. *and walk in love, as CHRIST also hath loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to GOD.* St. Peter to the same purpose tells us, 1 Pet. i. 18. that *CHRIST also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to GOD, being put to death in the flesh*: here *CHRIST* is said to have suffered for sin; and to declare that the apostle did not only mean that *CHRIST* suffered upon the occasion of our sins, but that he suffered in the place and stead of the sinner, he adds, *the just for the unjust*, that is, the Son of GOD, who was innocent and had no sin, suffered for us who were sinners; or as it is elsewhere expressed, *he bare our sins in his own body on the tree.*

It is true indeed, that *CHRIST* suffered for our benefit and advantage; which the Socinians would have to be all that is meant in the texts which I have cited: but then it ought to be considered, that *CHRIST*'s suffering for our benefit and advantage does by no means exclude, nor is any wise inconsistent with his suffering in our stead. For whoever suffers in another man's stead, and to save him from suffering, does undoubtedly suffer for his benefit and advantage, and gives the best demonstration of it that can be: but the manner of the expression, if compared with other parallel texts of scripture, and especially with what is so often said of our SAVIOUR's being a sacrifice, which I shall have occasion farther to urge by and by: I say, the manner of the expression, if well considered, will appear to any man that is not contentious to signify our SAVIOUR's suffering instead of the sinner.

But not to argue from words and phrases, I will produce two texts which declare this matter so plainly, that the force of them is not to be avoided, without the most

shameful wresting and perverting of them. *This is my commandment, says our SAVIOUR, John xv. 12. that you love one another, as I have loved you.* How is that? He declares in the next words, ver. 13. *Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend,* that is, that he be contented to die in his stead. And to the same purpose St. Paul, Rom. vi. 6, 7, 8. *For when ye were yet sinners in due time CHRIST died for the ungodly:* now the question is, whether by this expression of *CHRIST's dying for the ungodly*, be meant only his dying for the benefit and advantage of sinners, but not his dying in their stead? This, let the words which immediately follow determine: *For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man one would even dare to die: but GOD commendeth his love to us, in that whilst we were yet sinners CHRIST died for us.* And now I appeal to any man of good sense, whether it be not plain that the apostle here speaks of *CHRIST's dying for sinners* in the same sense as one man is said to die for another, that is, to save another from death; which what is it else but to die in his stead? He that can deny this, is perverse to the highest degree, and I fear almost beyond the possibility of being convinced.

And the argument from these two texts is so much the stronger, because we do not here reason merely from the phrase and expression, but from the main scope of our SAVIOUR's discourse in the one, and of St. Paul's in the other. For the design of both, is to recommend the superlative love of *CHRIST* to us, above the greatest love that ever any man expressed to another. The highest pitch that human affection did ever rise to, was for a man to lay down his life for his friend; but the Son of *GOD* laid down his life for his enemies. *Scarcely*, says St. Paul, *would one lay down his life for a righteous man*, that is, for one who is but strictly just and honest, and does no body wrong; but for a good man that is, for one that is kind and beneficial to all, and hath obliged mankind by great benefits, some one may be found that would lay down his life to save the life of

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such a person: but the love of CHRIST hath gone far beyond this: he *died for sinners*, for those who were neither good men nor righteous: *But GOD commendeth his love to us, in that whilst we were yet sinners CHRIST died for us.* Now where doth the force of this argument lie, if not in this? That CHRIST hath done that for us, who were enemies and sinners, which some very few persons in the world have done for their friend, or some very eminently good man: and what is that? Why they have laid down their lives in their stead: and so CHRIST hath done for us. This seems to be so very plain, that I do not see how the force of this argument is possible to be avoided.

It is evident then from scripture, that CHRIST died not only for our advantage but in our stead; as truly and really as any man ever did or can die for another, who lays down his own life to save another from death. For if CHRIST had not died, we had perished everlastingly; and because he died, we are saved from eternal death and misery.

And though this be no where in scripture spoken of by the name or term of satisfaction, yet it is said to be the price of our redemption; which surely is the same in effect with satisfaction. For as we are sinners we are liable, and, as I may say, indebted to the justice of GOD: and the Son of GOD, by his death and sufferings in our nature, hath discharged this obligation and paid this debt for us: which discharge since it was obtained for us by the shedding of CHRIST's blood, and the scripture tells us, that *without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins*: and since GOD is graciously pleased to accept of it for the debt which we owed to his justice, and to declare himself fully pleased and contented with it; why it may not properly enough be called payment or satisfaction, I confess I am not able to understand. Men may eternally wrangle about any thing, but what a frivolous contention, what a trifling in serious matters, what a barrety in divinity is this?

Not that God was angry with his Son, when he thus *laid on him the iniquities of us all*: no, he was always well pleased with him; and never better, than when he *became obedient to the death, even the death of the cross, and bore our sins in his own body on the tree.*

Nor yet that our SAVIOUR suffered the very same that the sinner should have suffered, namely, the proper pains and torment of the damned: but that his obedience and sufferings were of that value and esteem with God, and his voluntary sacrifice of himself so well pleasing to him, that he thereupon entered into a covenant of grace and mercy with mankind, wherein he hath engaged himself to forgive the sins of those who believe and repent, and to make them partakers of eternal life. And hence the *blood of CHRIST* which was shed for us upon the cross, is called *the blood of the covenant*, as being the sanction of that new covenant, into which God is entred with mankind: and not only the sanction and confirmation of that covenant, but the very foundation of it: for which reason the cup in the LORD's supper is called the new testament, or, as the word should rather be rendered, *the new covenant in his blood, which was shed for many for the remission of sins.* I proceed now to the

II^d Thing propounded, which was to shew that the expiation of our sins was made by the sufferings of CHRIST, from the nature and intention of expiatory sacrifices, both among the Jews and Heathens; to which the death of CHRIST is in the new testament so frequently compared, and in point of virtue and efficacy to take away sin infinitely preferred to it.

Now the nature and design of expiatory sacrifices was plainly this: to substitute one living creature to suffer and die instead of another; so that what the sinner deserved to have suffered, was supposed to be done to the sacrifice, that is, it was slain to make an atonement for the sinner.

And though there was no reason to hope for any such effect from the blood of bulls or goats, or of any other living

Ser. 47.

living creature; yet for it, in ignorance

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And this shew the CHRIST, of the sacrifice of CHRIST, which the sinner: but the end of the sacrifice efficacy of the expected from them, was

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living creatures that were wont to be offered up in sacrifice; yet that both Jews and Heathen did expect and hope for it, is so very evident, that it cannot without extreme ignorance or obstinacy be denied.

But this expectation, how unreasonable soever, plainly shews it to have been the common apprehension of mankind in all ages, that God would not be appeased, nor should sin be pardoned, without suffering: but yet so that men generally conceived good hopes, that upon the repentance of sinners God would accept of a vicarious punishment; that is, of the suffering of some other in their stead. And very probably, as I said before, in compliance with this apprehension of mankind, and in condescension to it, as well as for other weighty reasons best known to the divine wisdom, God was pleased to find out such a sacrifice as should really and effectually procure for them that great blessing of the forgiveness of sins, which they had so long hoped for from the multitude of their own sacrifices.

And the apostle to the Hebrews doth in a large discourse shew the great virtue and efficacy of the sacrifice of CHRIST, to the purpose of remission of sins, above that of the sacrifices under the law: and that the death of CHRIST is really and effectually to our advantage, all that which the sacrifices under the law were supposed to be to the sinner: *but now once*, saith the apostle here in the text, *in the end of the world, hath he appeared to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* This is the great virtue and efficacy of the sacrifice of CHRIST, that whatever was expected from any other sacrifices, either by Jews or Heathens, was really effected by this.

This was plainly signified by the Jewish passover, wherein the lamb was slain, and the sinner did escape and was passed by. In allusion whereto, St. Paul makes no scruple to call CHRIST our passover or paschal lamb, who was slain that we might escape: CHRIST *our passover*, says he, 1 Cor. v. 7. *is slain, or offered for us*; that is, he by the gracious appointment of God was substituted to suffer all that in our stead, which the paschal lamb was supposed to suffer for the sinner.

And this was likewise signified by the sinner's laying his hand upon the sacrifice that was to be slain, thereby as it were transferring the punishment which was due to himself upon the sacrifice that was to be slain and offered up. For so GOD tells Moses, that the sinner, who came to offer an expiatory sacrifice, should do: *He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering, and it shall be accepted for him, to make an atonement for him.* Lev. i. 4. And the apostle tells us, that it was an established principle in the Jewish religion, that *without shedding of blood there was no remission of sins*: which plainly shews that they expected this benefit of the remission of sins, from the blood of their sacrifices.

And then he tells us, that we are really made partakers of this benefit by the blood of CHRIST, and by the virtue of his sacrifice: and again, Heb. ix. 28. CHRIST, says he, *was once offered to bear the sins of many*; plainly alluding to the sacrifices under the law; which did, as it were, bear the faults of the sinner.

And that this expression, of CHRIST's being *offered to bear our sins*, cannot be meant of his taking away our sins by his holy doctrine which was confirmed by his death, but of his bearing our sins by way of imputation, and by his suffering for them in our stead, as the sacrifice was supposed to do for the sinner: this, I say, is evident beyond all denial, from the opposition which follows after the text, between his first appearance and his second; CHRIST, says our apostle, ver. 28. *was once offered to bear our sins; but unto them that look for him he shall appear a second time without sin unto salvation.* Why? Did he not appear the first time without sin? Yes certainly, as to any inherent guilt; for the scripture tells us, *he had no sin*. What then is the meaning of the opposition, that at his first coming *he bore our sins*, but at his second coming *he shall appear without sin unto salvation*? These words can have no other imaginable sense but this, that at his first coming he sustained the person of a sinner and suffered instead of us; but his second coming shall be upon another account, and *he shall appear without*

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without sin unto salvation; that is, not as a sacrifice, but as a judge, to confer the reward of eternal life upon those who are partakers of the benefit of that sacrifice, which he offered to God for us *in the days of his flesh*. I proceed to the

III^d Thing I propos'd, and which yet remains to be spoken to; namely, to vindicate this method and dispensation of the divine wisdom from the objections which are brought against it; and to shew that there is nothing in it that is unreasonable, or any wise unworthy of God. I shall mention four objections which are commonly urged in this matter, and I think they are all that are considerable.

Object. 1st. That this method, of the expiation of sin by the sufferings of CHRIST, seems to argue some defect and want of goodness in God, as if he needed some external motive, and were not of himself disposed to forgive sinners.

To which I think the answer is not difficult, namely, that God did not want goodness to have forgiven sin freely and without any satisfaction, but his wisdom did not think it meet to give encouragement to sin by too easy a forgiveness, and without some remarkable testimony of his severe displeasure against it: and therefore his greater goodness and compassion to mankind *devis'd this way to save the sinner, without giving the least countenance and encouragement to sin.

For God to think of saving us any way, was excessive goodness and mercy; but to think of doing it in this way, by substituting his dearly beloved Son to suffer in our stead, is a condescension so very amazing, that if God had not been pleas'd of his own goodness to stoop to it, it had almost been blasphemy in man to have thought of it, or desired it.

Object. 2^d. How can our sins be said to have been forgiven freely, if the pardon of them was purchased at so dear a rate and so mighty a price was paid for it?

In answer to this I desire these two things may be considered. 1st, That it is a wonderful grace and favour of God, to admit of this translation of the punishment which was due to us, and to accept of the sufferings of another in our stead, and for our benefit; when he might justly have exacted it of us in our own persons: so that even in this respect we are, as St. Paul says, *justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in JESUS CHRIST*: and freely too in respect of any necessity that lay upon God to forgive us in this or any other way. It was a free act of his goodness to save us, even by the satisfaction and sufferings of his own Son. 2dly, It was in effect freely too, notwithstanding the mighty price which was paid for our redemption. Because this price was not of our own procuring, but of God's providing; he *found out this ransom for us*. And will any man say, that a prince who prevails with his son to intercede for the pardon of a rebel, yea and to suffer some punishment or to pay a fine for the obtaining of it, does not in effect and in all equitable and grateful construction forgive him freely?

Object. 3d. It is yet further objected, that this seems to be more unreasonable than the sacrificing of beasts among the Jews, nay, than the sacrificing of men among the heathen, and even of their own sons and daughters: because this is the offering up of the *Son of God*, the most innocent and the most excellent person that ever was.

To which I answer, that if we consider the manner, and the design of it, the thing will appear to be quite otherwise.

As to the manner of it, God did not command his Son to be sacrificed, but his providence permitted the wickedness and violence of men to put him to death: and then his goodness and wisdom did over-rule this worst of actions to the best of ends. And if we consider the matter aright, how is this any more a reflection upon the holy providence of God, than any enormities and cruel-

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And then if we consider the end and design of this permission of CHRIST's death, and the application of it to the purpose of a general expiation ; we cannot but acknowledge, and even adore the gracious and merciful design of it. For by this means GOD did at once put an end to that unreasonable and bloody way of worship, which had been so long practised in the world : and after this one sacrifice, which was so infinitely dear to GOD, the benefit of expiation was not to be expected in any other way ; all other sacrifices being worthless and vain in comparison of this : and it hath ever since obtained this effect, of making all other sacrifices to cease, in all parts of the world where Christianity hath prevailed.

Object. 4th. The last objection is, the injustice and cruelty of an innocent person's suffering instead of the offender.

To this I answer, that they who make so great a noise with this objection do seem to me to give a full and clear answer to it themselves, by acknowledging, as they constantly and expressly do, that our SAVIOUR suffered all this for our benefit and advantage, though not in our place and stead. For this, to my apprehension, is plainly to give up the cause, unless they can shew a good reason why there is not as much injustice and cruelty in an innocent person's suffering for the benefit and advantage of a malefactor, as in his suffering in his stead : so little do men, in the heat of dispute and opposition, who are resolved to hold fast an opinion in despite of reason and good sense, consider, that they do many times in effect, and by necessary consequence, grant the very thing which in express terms they do so stiffly and pertinaciously deny.

The truth of the matter is this ; there is nothing of injustice or cruelty in either case ; neither in an innocent person's suffering for the benefit of an offender, nor in his stead ; supposing the suffering to be voluntary : but they have

have equally the same appearance of injustice and cruelty : nor can I possibly discern any reason why injustice and cruelty should be objected in the one case more than in the other ; there being every whit as little reason why an innocent person should suffer for the benefit of a criminal, as why he should suffer in his stead. So that I hope this objection, which above all the rest hath been so loudly and so invidiously urged, hath received a just answer.

And I believe, if the matter were searched to the bottom, all this perverse contention, about our SAVIOUR's suffering for our benefit but not in our stead, will signify just nothing. For if CHRIST died for our benefit so as some way or other, by virtue of his death and sufferings, to save us from the wrath of GOD and to procure our escape from eternal death, this, for ought I know, is all that any body means by his dying in our stead. For he that dies with an intention to do that benefit to another as to save him from death, doth certainly to all intents and purposes die in his place and stead.

And if they will grant this to be their meaning, the controversy is at an end ; and both sides are agreed in the thing, and do only differ in the phrase and manner of expression : which is to seek a quarrel and an occasion of difference where there is no real ground for it ; a thing which ought to be very far from reasonable and peaceable minds.

For the Socinians say, that our SAVIOUR's voluntary obedience and sufferings did procure his exaltation at the right-hand of GOD, and power and authority to forgive sins, and to give eternal life to as many as he pleased : so that they grant that his obedience and sufferings, in their meritorious consequence of them, do redound to our benefit and advantage as much as we pretend and say they do : only they are loth in express terms to acknowledge that CHRIST died in our stead : and this, for no other reason that I can imagine, but because they have denied it so often and so long.

But I appeal to the ingenuity of our adversaries, whether this do not in the last issue come all to one ; and be not, on their part, a mere controversy about words : for suppose a malefactor condemned to some grievous punishment, and the king's son to save him from it is contented to submit to great disgrace and sufferings : in reward of which sufferings the king takes his son into his throne and sets him at his own right-hand, and gives him power to pardon this malefactor, and upon a fitting submission and repentance to advance him to honour : will not any man in this case allow that the king's son suffered instead of this malefactor, and smile at any man that shall be so nice as to grant, that indeed he suffered for him, but yet to deny, that he was punished for him ; to allow that he bore the inconvenience of his faults, but yet obstinately to stand it out, that the faults of this malefactor were not laid upon him, or in any wise so imputed to him that he can be said to have suffered in his stead ? This is just the case, and the difference in reality and in the last result of things is nothing but words.

Thus far have I tired your patience in a contentious argument ; in which I take no pleasure, but yet shall be glad if I may be so happy as by any thing that hath been said to contribute towards the putting an end to so unhappy a controversy, which hath troubled the world so long, and raised such a dust that very few have been able to see clearly through it.

However I cannot dismiss this argument without making some useful but very short reflections upon this great doctrine of our religion, namely, that the Son of God being made a sacrifice for us, and exposed to such bitter sufferings and so cruel a death for the expiation of our sins, should create in us the greatest dread and detestation of sin, and for ever deter us from all wilful transgression and disobedience. For if the guilt of our sins was done away upon such hard terms, and cost the dearly loved Son of God so much sweat and blood, then surely we ought to take great heed how by our renewed provocations we renew his passion, and do what in us lies

to crucify to ourselves the Son of God afresh, and to put him to an open shame.

If God did so terribly afflict the dearly beloved of his soul for our sakes; if the Son of God was so grievously wounded for our transgressions and so sorely bruised for our iniquities: if so fearful a storm of vengeance fell upon the most innocent person that ever was for our sins, then we have reason to take that kind and merciful admonition of the Son of God to sinners, to *sin no more, lest a worse thing, if it be possible, come upon ourselves.*

In this dispensation of God's grace and mercy to mankind, by the death of his Son, God seems to have gone to the very extremity of things, and almost further than goodness and justice will well admit; to afflict innocency itself to save the guilty: and if herein God hath expressed his hatred of sin in such a wonderful way of love and kindness to the sons of men as looks almost like hatred of innocency and his own Son: this ought in all ingenuity and gratitude to our gracious Redeemer, who *was made a curse for us, and loved us to that degree as to wash us from our sins in his own blood*; I say, this ought to beget in us a greater displeasure against sin, and a more perfect detestation of it, than if we had suffered the punishment due to it, in our own persons: for in this case, we could only have been displeased at ourselves, and our sins as the just cause of our sufferings; but in the other, we ought to hate sin as the unhappy occasion of the saddest misfortune and sorest calamities to the best man that ever was, and to our best friend, for our sins and for our sakes.

Since then the Son of God hath so graciously condescended to be *made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted*; let us aspire as much as is possible, to become like to him: above all, let us hate and avoid sin as the only thing in which the Son of God would have no part with us, though he was contented to suffer such bitter things to save us from the defilement and dominion of

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He had no sin, but GOD was pleased to lay upon him the iniquities of us all, and to make his soul an offering for sin, and to permit all that to be done to him which was due to us: he was contented to be sacrificed once for all mankind, that men might for ever cease from that inhuman and ineffectual way of sacrificing one another, whereby instead of expiating their guilt they did inflame it, and by thinking to make atonement for their sins they did in truth add to the number and heinousness of them.

And let us likewise learn from this admirable pattern, to pity those that are in misery, as CHRIST also hath pitied us; and to *save them that are ready to perish*, for his sake who came to seek and to save us that were lost.

Let us, upon all occasions, be ready to open our bowels of compassion towards the poor; in a thankful imitation of his grace and goodness who for our sakes chose to be a beggar, that we for his sake might not despise the poor, but might have a tender regard and compassion to those whose condition in this world does so nearly resemble that in which the Son of GOD thought it fittest for him to appear when he was pleased to become man.

In a word, let us in the whole course, and in all the actions of our lives, *show forth the virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light*; and hath raised up a mighty salvation for us, that being delivered from all our spiritual enemies, from sin and all the powers of darkness, we might serve him who hath saved us; walking in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our lives.

Now, to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain: to GOD even our Father, and to our LORD JESUS CHRIST, the first begotten from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth: unto him, who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and whilst we were enemies to him, loved us at such a rate as never any man did his friend. To him, who became man, that he might bring us to GOD; and

assumed our frail and mortal nature, that he might clothe us with immortality and life: to him, who was pleased to dwell and live amongst us, that he might teach us how to live: to him, *who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, and lives for ever to make intercession for us:* to him be glory and dominion, thanksgiving and praise to eternal ages. Amen.

S E R M O N XLVIII.

Concerning the Unity of the Divine Nature, and the Blessed Trinity, &c.

1 TIM. ii. 5.

For there is one God.

THE particle *for* leads us to the consideration of the context and occasion of these words, which in short is this. The design of this epistle is to direct Timothy, to whom St. Paul had committed the government of the church of Ephesus, how he ought to demean himself in that great and weighty charge. And at the beginning of this chapter he gives direction concerning publick prayers in the church; that *prayers and thanksgiving be made for all men, and for all ranks and orders of men: especially for kings and all that are in authority, that under them Christians might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*

And this he tells us was very suitable to the Christian religion, by which God designed the salvation of mankind; and therefore it must needs be very acceptable to him that we should offer up prayers and thanksgiving to him in behalf of all men: *For this, saith the apostle*

is good and acceptable in the sight of GOD our SAVIOUR, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

And then it follows in the next words, *For there is one GOD, and one Mediator between GOD and men, the man CHRIST JESUS, who gave himself a ransom for all:* as if he had said, this universal charity of Christians, in praying for all men, must needs be very acceptable to him to whom we put up our prayers, GOD the Father, who sent his son for the salvation of all men: and to him likewise by whom we offer up our prayers to GOD, and is amongst us Christians the only *Mediator between GOD and men*, in virtue of that price and ransom which he paid for the redemption of all mankind; I say, for this reason it must needs be very acceptable to him that we should pray for all men, because he died for all men, and now that he is in heaven at the right hand of GOD intercedes with him for the salvation of those for whom he died: *there is one GOD, and one Mediator between GOD and men, the man CHRIST JESUS, who gave himself a ransom for all.*

Which words, though they be brought in to prove more immediately that it is *acceptable to GOD our SAVIOUR*, that we should put up our prayers to him for all men, because he desires the salvation of all men, and hath sent his Son to purchase the salvation of all men, by the sacrifice of himself; and in virtue of that sacrifice to be the only Mediator between GOD and us: I say, though this be the immediate scope and design of these words, yet they are likewise a direction to us, unto whom we ought to address our prayers, namely, to GOD; and by whose mediation and intercession we ought to put up our prayers to GOD the Father, namely, by his Son JESUS CHRIST, who is constituted the only *Mediator between GOD and men*.

There are several other propositions contained in this and the following verse; but I shall at present confine myself to the first, namely, that there is one GOD, that is, but one, as St. Paul elsewhere expresseth it, *There*

is none other GOD but one. 1 Cor. viii. 4. And Moses lays this as the foundation of the natural law, as well as of the Jewish religion, *The LORD he is one GOD, and there is none besides him.* Deut. iv. 35. that is, besides Jehovah, whom the people of Israel did worship as the only true GOD. And this the prophet Isaiah perpetually declares in opposition to the polytheism and variety of gods among the heathen. *I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no god.* Isai. xlv. 6. And again, ver. 8. *Is there any god besides me? There is no god, I know not any:* he, who hath an infinite knowledge and knows all things, knows no other god. And our blessed SAVIOUR makes this the fundamental article of all religion, and the knowledge of it necessary to every man's salvation; *this, says he, is life eternal, to know thee the only true GOD.*

The unity of the divine nature is a notion, wherein the greatest and the wisest part of mankind did always agree, and therefore may reasonably be presumed to be either natural, or to have sprung from some original tradition delivered down to us from the first parents of mankind: I mean, that there is one supreme being, the author and cause of all things, whom the most ancient of the heathen poets commonly called the father of gods and men. And thus Aristotle in his metaphysics defines GOD, the eternal and most excellent, or best of all living beings. And this notion of one supreme being, agrees very well with that exact harmony which appears in the frame and government of the world, in which we see all things conspiring to one end, and continuing in one uniform order and course; which cannot reasonably be ascribed to any other but a constant and uniform cause; and which to a considering man does plainly shew that all things are made and governed by that one powerful principle, and great and wise mind which we call GOD.

But although the generality of mankind had a notion of one supreme GOD, yet the idolatry of the heathen plainly shews, that this notion in process of time was greatly degenerated, and corrupted into an apprehension of a plurality

plurality of gods; though in reason it is evident enough, that there can be no more gods than one; and that one, who is of infinite perfection, is as sufficient to all purposes whatsoever, as ten thousand deities, if they were possible, could possibly be; as I shall shew in the following discourse.

Now this multitude of deities, which the fond superstition and vain imagination of men had formed to themselves, were by the wiser sort, who being forced to comply with the follies of the people endeavoured to make the best of them, supposed to be either parts of the universe, which the Egyptians, as Plutarch tells us, thought to be the same with GOD; but then the more considerable parts of the universe they parcelled out into several deities: and as the ocean hath several names, according to the several coasts and countries by which it passeth; so they gave several names to this one deity, according to the several parts of the world which several nations made the objects of their worship.

Or else, they adored the several perfections and powers of the one supreme GOD, under several names and titles, with regard to the various blessings and benefits which they thought they received from him.

Thus the Indian philosophers, the brachmans, are said to have worshipped the sun as the supreme deity; and he certainly is the most worshipful of all sensible beings, and bids fairest for a deity; especially if he was, as they supposed, animated by a spirit endued with knowledge and understanding. And if a man, who had been bred in a dark cave, should all on the sudden be brought out at noon-day to behold this visible world; after he had viewed and considered it a while, he would in all probability pitch upon the sun as the most likely, of all the things he had seen, to be a deity. For if such a man had any notion of a god, and were to choose one upon sight, he would without dispute fix upon the sun, and fall down before him and worship him.

And Macrobius manageth this as his main plea for the idolatry of the heathen, that under all the several names

of their gods they worshipped the sun : and this diversity of names was but a more distinct conception and acknowledgment of the many blessings and advantages which mankind received from him, and a more particular and express adoration of the several powers and perfections which were in him. And this was the very best defence, and all the tolerable sense which the wisest among the heathen could make of the multitude of their deities.

And yet whilst they generally owned one supreme being that was the principle and original of all things, they worshipped several subordinate deities as really distinct from one another. Some of these they fancied to be superior to the rest, and to have their residence in heaven ; by which Marsilius Ficinus supposes Plato to mean no more but the chief of the angels. These were called *Ædæi*, *dii superi* and *dii cælestes*, superior and heavenly gods : the scripture terms them the host of heaven, meaning the sun, moon and stars, which they supposed to be animated, or at least to be inhabited by angels or glorious spirits, whom they call gods.

Other of their deities were accounted much inferior to these, being supposed to be the souls of their deceased heroes ; who for their great and worthy deeds, when they lived upon earth, were supposed after death to be translated into the number of their gods. And these were called *semidei* and *deastri*, that is, half gods and a sort of gods : and as the other were celestial, so these were *δαίμονες ἐπιχθόνιοι*, a kind of terrestrial spirits, that were presidents and procurators of human affairs here below, that is, a middle sort of divine powers that were mediators and agents between God and men, and did carry the prayers and supplications of men to God, and bring down the commands and blessings of God to men.

But in the midst of all this crowd and confusion of deities, and the various superstitions about them, the wiser heathen, as Thales, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Tully, Plutarch and others, preserved a true notion of one supreme God, whom they defined an

infinite

infinite spirit, pure from all matter and free from all imperfection: and all the variety of their worship was, as they pretended in excuse of it, but a more particular owning of the various representations of the divine power and excellencies which manifested themselves in the world, and of the several communications of blessings and favours by them imparted to men: and * Tertullian observes, that even when idolatry had very much obscured the glory of the sovereign deity, yet the greater part of mankind did still in their common forms of speech, appropriate the name of God in a more special and peculiar manner to one, saying, *if God grant, if God please*, and the like.

So that there is sufficient ground to believe that the unity of the divine nature, or the notion of one supreme God, creator and governor of the world, was the primitive and general belief of mankind: and that polytheism and idolatry were a corruption and degeneracy from the original notion which mankind had concerning God; as the scripture history doth declare and testify.

And this account, which I have given of the heathen idolatry, doth by no means excuse it. For whatever may be said by way of extenuation in behalf of some few of the wiser and more devout among them, the generality were grossly guilty both of believing more gods, and of worshipping false gods.

And this must needs be a very great crime, since the scripture every where declares God to be particularly jealous in this case, and that *he will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven images*. Nay, we may not so much as make use of sensible images to put us in mind of God, lest devout ignorance, seeing the worship which wise men paid towards an idol, should be drawn to terminate their worship there, as being the very deity itself; which was certainly the case of the greatest part of the heathen world.

And surely those Christians are in no less danger of idolatry, who pay a veneration to images by kneeling
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* *Adversus Marcionem*, l. 1, c. 10.

down and praying before them; and in this they are much more inexcusable, because they offend against a much clearer light; and yet when they go about to justify this practice, are able to bring no other nor better pleas for themselves than the heathen did for their worshipping of images, and for praying to their inferior deities, whom they looked upon as mediators between the gods in heaven and men upon earth.

There is but one objection, that I know of, against the general consent of mankind concerning the unity of God; and it is this, that there was an ancient doctrine of some of the most ancient nations, that there were two first causes or principles of all things; the one the cause of all good, and the other of all the evil that is in the world: the reason whereof seems to have been, that they could not apprehend how things of so contrary a nature, as good and evil, could proceed from one and the same cause.

And these two principles in several nations were called by several names. Plutarch says that among the Greeks the good principle was called God, and the evil principle *δαίμων* or the devil. In conformity to which ancient tradition the Manichees, a sect which called themselves Christians, did advance two principles, the one infinitely good, which they supposed to be the original cause of all the good which is in the world; the other infinitely evil, to which they ascribed all the evils that are in the world.

But all this is very plainly a corruption of a much more ancient tradition concerning that old serpent the devil, the head of the fallen angels, who by tempting our first parents to transgress a positive and express law of God, brought sin first into the world and all the evils consequent upon it; of which the scripture gives us a most express and particular account.

And as to the notion of a being infinitely evil, into which this tradition was corrupted, after idolatry had prevailed in the world, besides that it is a contradiction, it would likewise be to no purpose to assert two opposite principles

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principles of infinite, that is of equal force and power, for two infinities must of necessity be equal to one another; because nothing can be more or greater than infinite, and therefore if two infinite beings were possible they would certainly be equal, and could not be otherwise.

Now that the notion of a principle infinitely evil is a contradiction will be very plain, if we consider that what is infinitely evil must in strict reasoning, and by necessary consequence, be infinitely imperfect, and therefore infinitely weak; and for that reason, though never so malicious and mischievous, yet being infinitely weak and foolish, could never be in capacity either to contrive mischief or to execute it.

But if it should be admitted that a being infinitely mischievous could be infinitely knowing and powerful, yet it could effect no evil; because the opposite principle of infinite goodness, being also infinitely wise and powerful, they would tie up one another's hands. So that upon this supposition the notion of a deity must signify just nothing, because by virtue of the eternal opposition and equal conflict of these two principles they would keep one another at a perpetual bay; and being just an equal match to one another, the one having as much mind and power to do good as the other to do evil, instead of being two deities they would be but two idols, able to do neither good nor evil.

And having, I hope, now sufficiently cleared this objection, I shall proceed to shew how agreeable this principle, that *there is but one God*, is to the common reason of mankind, and to the clearest and most essential notions which we have of God: and this will appear these two ways.

First, by considering the most essential perfections of the divine nature.

Secondly, from the repugnancy and impossibility, the great absurdity and inconvenience of supposing more gods than one.

First, by considering the most essential perfections of the divine nature. Absolute perfection which we ascribe
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to God, as the most essential notion which mankind hath always had concerning him, does necessarily suppose unity; because this is essential to the notion of a being that is absolutely perfect, that all perfection meets and is united in such a being: but to imagine more gods, and some perfections to be in one and some in another, does destroy the most essential notion which men have of God, namely, that he is a being absolutely perfect, that is, as perfect as is possible: now to suppose some perfections in one God which are not in another, is to suppose some possible perfection to be wanting in God, which is a contradiction to the most natural and the most easy notion which all men have of God, that he is a being in whom all perfections do meet and are united: but if we suppose more gods, each of which hath all perfections united in him, then all but one would be superfluous and needless; and therefore by just and necessary consequence not only may, but of necessity must be supposed not to be; since necessary existence is essential to the deity; and therefore if but one God be necessary, there can be no more.

Secondly, from the repugnancy and impossibility, the great absurdity and inconvenience of the contrary. For suppose there were more gods, two for example; and if there may be two, there may be a million, for we can stop no where: I say, suppose two gods; either these two would be in all perfections equal and alike, or unequal and unlike: if equal and alike in all things, then, as I said before, one of them would be needless and superfluous, and if one, why not as well as the other? They being supposed to be in all things perfectly alike; and then there would be no necessity at all of the being of a God; and yet it is granted on all hands, that necessary existence is essential to the notion of a God: But if they be unequal, that is, one of them inferior to and less perfect than the other, that which is inferior and less perfect could not be God, because he would not have all perfection. So that which way soever we turn the thing and look upon it, the notion of more gods than one is by its own repugnancy and self-contradiction destructive of itself.

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Before I come to apply this doctrine of the unity of God, I must not pass by a very considerable difficulty, which will most certainly arise in every man's mind, without taking particular notice of it, and endeavouring to remove it, if I can. And it is the doctrine of the blessed Trinity, or of three real differences or distinct persons in one and the same divine nature.

And though this be not a difficulty peculiar only to the Christian religion, as by the generality of those who urge this objection against Christians hath been inconsiderately thought; for it is certain, that long before Christianity appeared in the world, there was a very ancient tradition, both among Jews and heathen, concerning three real differences or distinctions in the divine nature, very nearly resembling the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, as I shall have occasion more fully to shew by and by: yet it cannot be denied, but that this difficulty doth in a more especial manner affect the Christian religion; the generality of Christians, who do most firmly believe the Trinity, believing likewise at the same time, more stedfastly if it be possible, that there is but one God. *To us*, saith St. Paul, that is, to us Christians, *there is but one God*. 1 Cor. viii. 6. But how can this possibly consist with the common doctrine of Christians concerning the Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to each of whom they attribute, as they verily believe the scripture does, the most incommunicable properties and perfections of the divine nature? And what is this less in effect than to say, that there are three gods?

For the clearing of this difficulty, I shall, with all the brevity I can, offer these following considerations; which I hope, to an impartial and uprejudiced judgment, will be sufficient to remove it, or at least to break the main force and strength of it.

I. I desire it may be well considered, that there is a wide difference between the nice speculations of the schools, beyond what is revealed in scripture, concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, and what the scripture only teaches

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teaches and asserts concerning this mystery. For it is not to be denied, but that the school-men, who abounded in wit and leisure, though very few among them had either exact skill in the holy scriptures, or in ecclesiastical antiquity and the writings of the most ancient fathers of the Christian church: I say, it cannot be denied but that these speculative and very acute men, who wrought a great part of their divinity out of their own brains, as spiders do cobwebs out of their own bowels, have started a thousand subtleties about this mystery, such as no Christian is bound to trouble his head withal; much less is it necessary for him to understand those niceties, which we may reasonably presume that they who talk of them did themselves never thoroughly understand; and least of all is it necessary to believe them. The modesty of Christians is contented in divine mysteries to know what God hath thought fit to reveal concerning them, and hath no curiosity to be *wise above that which is written*. It is enough to believe what God says concerning these matters; and if any man will venture to say more, every other man surely is at his liberty to believe as he sees reason.

II. I desire it may in the next place be considered, that the doctrine of the Trinity, even as it is asserted in scripture, is acknowledged by us to be still a great mystery, and so imperfectly revealed as to be in a great measure incomprehensible by human reason. And therefore though some learned and judicious men may have very commendably attempted a more particular explication of this great mystery by the strength of reason, yet I dare not pretend to that, knowing both the difficulty and danger of such an attempt, and mine own insufficiency for it.

All that I ever designed upon this argument, was to make out the credibility of the thing from the authority of the holy scriptures, without descending to a more particular explication of it than the scripture hath given us; lest by endeavouring to lay the difficulties which are

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already started about it new ones should be raised, and such as may perhaps be much harder to be removed than those which we have now to grapple withal. And this I hope I have in some measure done in one of the former discourses. * Nor indeed do I see that it is any ways necessary to do more; it being sufficient that God hath declared what he thought fit in this matter, and that we do firmly believe what he says concerning it to be true, though we do not perfectly comprehend the meaning of all that he hath said about it.

For in this and the like cases, I take an implicit faith to be very commendable, that is, to believe whatever we are sufficiently assured God hath revealed, though we do not fully understand his meaning in such a revelation. And thus every man, who believes the holy scriptures to be a truly divine revelation, does implicitly believe a great part of the prophetic books of scripture and several obscure expressions in those books, though he do not particularly understand the meaning of all the predictions and expressions contained in them. In like manner, there are certainly a great many very good Christians, who do not believe and comprehend the mysteries of faith nicely enough to approve themselves to a scholastical and magisterial judge of controversies, who yet if they heartily embrace the doctrines which are clearly revealed in scripture, and live up to the plain precepts of the Christian religion, will I doubt not be very well approved by the great and just, and by the infallibly infallible judge of the world.

III. Let it be farther considered, that though neither the word trinity, nor perhaps person, in the sense in which it is used by divines when they treat of this mystery, be any where to be met with in scripture; yet it cannot be denied but that three are there spoken of by the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in whose name every Christian is baptized, and to each of whom

* Serm. XLIV.

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the highest titles and properties of God are in scripture attributed: and these three are spoken of with as much distinction from one another, as we use to speak of three several persons.

So that though the word trinity be not found in scripture, yet these three are there expressly and frequently mentioned; and a trinity is nothing but three of any thing. And so likewise though the word person be not there expressly applied to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; yet it will be very hard to find a more convenient word whereby to express the distinction of these three. For which reason I could never see any just cause to quarrel at this term. For since the holy Spirit of God in scripture hath thought fit in speaking of these three to distinguish them from one another, as we use in common speech to distinguish three several persons, I cannot see any reason why, in the explication of this mystery which purely depends upon divine revelation, we should not speak of it in the same manner as the scripture doth: and though the word person is now become a term of art, I see no cause why we should decline it, so long as we mean by it neither more nor less than what the scripture says in other words.

IV. It deserves farther to be considered, that there hath been a very ancient tradition concerning three real differences or distinctions in the divine nature; and these, as I said before, very nearly resembling the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Whence this tradition had its original is not easy upon good and certain grounds to say; but certain it is, that the Jews anciently had this notion: and that they did distinguish the Word of God, and the holy Spirit of God, from him who was absolutely called God, and whom they looked upon as the first principle of all things, as is plain from Philo Judæus, and Moses Nachmanides, and others cited by the learned Grotius * in his incomparable book of the truth of the Christian religion.

* Book V.

And among the heathen, Plato, who probably enough might have this notion from the Jews, did make three distinctions in the deity by the names of essential goodness, and mind, and spirit.

So that whatever objections this matter may be liable to, it is not so peculiar a doctrine of the Christian religion, as many have imagined, though it is revealed by it with much more clearness and certainty : and consequently, neither the Jews nor Plato have any reason to object it to us Christians ; especially since they pretend no other ground for it but either their own reason, or an ancient tradition from their fathers : whereas we Christians do appeal to express divine revelation for what we believe in this matter, and do believe it singly upon that account.

V. It is besides very considerable, that the scriptures do deliver this doctrine of the Trinity, without any manner of doubt or question concerning the unity of the divine nature : and not only so, but do most stedfastly and constantly assert, that there is but one G O D : and in those very texts, in which these three differences are mentioned, the unity of the divine nature is expressly asserted ; as where St. John makes mention of the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, the unity of these three is likewise affirmed, *There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit ; and these three are one.*

VI. It is yet farther considerable, that from this mystery, as delivered in scripture, a plurality of gods cannot be inferred without making the scripture grossly to contradict itself ; which I charitably suppose the Socinians would be as loth to admit as we ourselves are. And if either councils, or fathers, or schoolmen, have explained this mystery as to give any just ground, or so much as a plausible colour for such an inference, let the blame fall where it is due, and let it not be charged on the holy scriptures ; but rather, as the

apostle says in another case, *Let God be true, and every man a liar.*

VIIthly and lastly, I desire it may be considered, that it is not repugnant to reason, to believe some things which are incomprehensible by our reason; provided that we have sufficient ground and reason for the belief of them: especially if they be concerning GOD, who is in his nature incomprehensible; and we be well assured that he hath revealed them. And therefore it ought not to offend us that these differences in the deity are incomprehensible by our finite understandings; because the divine nature itself is so, and yet the belief of that is the foundation of all religion.

There are a great many things in nature which we cannot comprehend how they either are, or can be: as the continuity of matter, that is, how the parts of it do hang so fast together that they are many times very hard to be parted; and yet we are sure that it is so, because we see it every day. So likewise, how the small seeds of things contain the whole form and nature of the things from which they proceed, and into which by degrees they grow; and yet we plainly see this every year.

There are many things likewise in ourselves, which no man is able in any measure to comprehend, as to the manner how they are done and performed: as the vital union of soul and body: who can imagine by what device or means a spirit comes to be so closely united and so firmly linked to a material body, that they are not to be parted without great force and violence offered to nature? The like may be said of the operations of our several faculties of sense and imagination, of memory and reason, and especially of the liberty of our wills: and yet we certainly find all these faculties in ourselves, though we cannot either comprehend or explain the particular manner in which the several operations of them are performed.

And if we cannot comprehend the manner of those operations, which we plainly perceive and feel to be in ourselves

ourselves, much less can we expect to comprehend things without us; and least of all can we pretend to comprehend the infinite nature and perfections of God, and every thing belonging to him. For God himself is certainly the greatest mystery of all other, and acknowledged by mankind to be in his nature, and in the particular manner of his existence, incomprehensible by human understanding. And the reason of this is very evident, because God is infinite, and our knowledge and understanding is but finite: and yet no sober man ever thought this a good reason to call the being of God in question.

The same may be said of God's certain knowledge of future contingencies, which depend upon the uncertain wills of free agents: it being utterly inconceivable how any understanding, how large and perfect soever, can certainly know beforehand that which depends upon the free will of another, which is an arbitrary and uncertain cause.

And yet the scripture doth not only attribute this foreknowledge to God, but gives us also plain instances of God's foretelling such things, many ages before they happened, as could not come to pass but by the sins of men, in which we are sure that God can have no hand; though nothing can happen without his permission: such was that most memorable event of CHRIST, who, as the scripture tells us, was *by wicked hands crucified and slain*; and yet even this is said to have happened *according to the determinate foreknowledge of God*, and was punctually foretold by him some hundreds of years before. Nay, the scripture doth not only ascribe this power and perfection to the divine knowledge, but natural reason hath yet been forced to acknowledge it, as we may see in some of the wisest of the philosophers. And yet it would puzzle the greatest philosopher that ever was, to give any tolerable account how any knowledge whatsoever can certainly and infallibly foresee an event through uncertain and contingent causes. All the reasonable satisfaction that can be had in this matter is this, that it is not at all

unreasonable to suppose that infinite knowledge may have ways of knowing things, which our finite understandings can by no means comprehend how they can possibly be known.

Again, there is hardly any thing more inconceivable than how a thing should be of itself, and without any cause of its being; and yet our reason compels us to acknowledge this: because we certainly see that something is, which must either have been of itself and without a cause, or else something that we do not see must have been of itself and have made all other things: and by this reasoning we are forced to acknowledge a deity, the mind of man being able to find no rest but in the acknowledgment of one eternal and wise mind, as the principle and first cause of all other things; and this principle is that which mankind do by general consent call *God*. So that *God* hath laid a sure foundation of our acknowledgment of his being in the reason of our own minds: and though it be one of the hardest things in the world to conceive how any thing can be of itself, yet necessity drives us to acknowledge it whether we will or no, and this being once granted, our reason, being tired in trying all other ways, will, for its own quiet and ease, force us at last to fall in with the general apprehension and belief of mankind concerning a deity.

To give but one instance more; there is the like difficulty in conceiving how any thing can be made out of nothing; and yet our reason doth oblige us to believe it: because matter, which is a very imperfect being and merely passive, must either always have been of itself, or else, by the infinite power of a most perfect and active being, must have been made out of nothing: which is much more credible, than that any thing so imperfect as matter is should be of itself: because that which is of itself cannot be conceived to have any bounds and limits of its being and perfection; for by the same reason that it necessarily is and of itself, it must necessarily have a many perfection, which it is certain matter hath not; and yet this necessary existence is so great a perfection, that we cannot

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reasonably suppose any thing that hath this perfection to want any other.

Thus you see by these instances, that it is not repugnant to reason to believe a great many things to be, of the manner of whose existence we are not able to give a particular and distinct account. And much less is it repugnant to reason to believe those things concerning **GOD**, which we are very well assured he hath declared concerning himself, though these things by our reason should be incomprehensible.

And this is truly the case as to the matter now under debate: we are sufficiently assured that the scriptures are a divine revelation, and that this mystery of the Trinity is therein declared to us. Now that we cannot comprehend it, is no sufficient reason not to believe it: for if this were a good reason for not believing it, then no man ought to believe that there is a **GOD**, because his nature is most certainly incomprehensible. But we are assured by many arguments that there is a **GOD**; and the same natural reason which assures us that he is, doth likewise assure us that he is incomprehensible; and therefore our believing him to be so doth by no means overthrow our belief of his being.

In like manner, we are assured by divine revelation of the truth of this doctrine of the Trinity; and being once assured of that, our not being able fully to comprehend it, is not reason enough to stagger our belief of it. A man cannot deny what he sees, though the necessary consequence of admitting it may be something which he cannot comprehend. One cannot deny the frame of this world which he sees with his eyes, though from thence it will necessarily follow, that either that or something else must be of itself; which yet, as I said before, is a thing which no man can comprehend how it can be.

And by the same reason a man must not deny what **GOD** says, to be true; though he cannot comprehend many things which **GOD** says: as particularly concerning this mystery of the Trinity. It ought then to satisfy us that there is sufficient evidence that this doctrine is delivered

vered in scripture, and that what is there declared concerning it doth not imply a contradiction. For why should our finite understandings pretend to comprehend that which is infinite, or to know all the real differences that are consistent with the unity of an infinite being; or to be able fully to explain this mystery by any similitude or resemblance taken from finite beings?

But before I leave this argument, I cannot but take notice of one thing which they of the church of Rome are perpetually objecting to us upon this occasion. And it is this, that by the same reason that we believe the doctrine of the Trinity, we may and must receive that of transubstantiation. God forbid: because of all the doctrines that ever were in any religion, this of transubstantiation is certainly the most abominably absurd.

However, this objection plainly shews how fondly and obstinately they are addicted to their own errors, how mishapen and monstrous soever, inasmuch that rather than the dictates of their church, how absurd soever, should be called in question, they will question the truth even of Christianity itself; and if we will not take in transubstantiation, and admit it to be a necessary article of the Christian faith, they grow so fullen and desperate that they matter not what becomes of all the rest: and rather than not have their will of us in that which is controverted, they will give up that which by their own confession is an undoubted article of the Christian faith, and not controverted on either side; except only by the Socinians, who yet are hearty enemies to transubstantiation; and have exposed the absurdity of it with great advantage.

But I shall endeavour to return a more particular answer to this objection; and such a one as I hope will satisfy every considerate and unprejudiced mind, that after all this confidence and swaggering of theirs there is by no means equal reason either for the receiving or for the rejecting of these two doctrines of the Trinity and transubstantiation.

First, there is not equal reason for the belief of these two doctrines. This objection, if it be of any force, must suppose that there is equal evidence and proof from scripture for these two doctrines: but this we utterly deny, and with great reason; because it is no more evident from the words of scripture that the sacramental bread is substantially changed into CHRIST's natural body by virtue of those words, *this is my body*, than it is that CHRIST is substantially changed into a natural vine by virtue of those words, *I am the true vine*; John xv. i. or than that the rock in the wilderness, of which the Israelites drank, was substantially changed into the person of CHRIST, because it is expressly said, *that rock was CHRIST*; or than that the Christian church is substantially changed into the natural body of CHRIST, because it is in express terms said of the church, that *it is his body*. Eph. i. 23.

But besides this, several of their own most learned writers have freely acknowledged, that transubstantiation can neither be directly proved, nor necessarily concluded from scripture: but this the writers of the Christian church did never acknowledge concerning the Trinity, and the divinity of CHRIST; but have always appealed to the clear and undeniable testimonies of scripture for the proof of these doctrines. And then the whole force of the objection amounts to this, that if I am bound to believe what I am sure GOD says, though I cannot comprehend it; then I am bound by the same reason to believe the greatest absurdity in the world, though I have no manner of assurance of any divine revelation concerning it. And if this be their meaning, though we understand not transubstantiation, yet we very well understand what they would have, but cannot grant it; because there is not equal reason to believe two things, for one of which there is good proof, and for the other no proof at all.

Secondly, neither is there equal reason for the rejecting of these two doctrines. This the objection supposes, which yet cannot be supposed but upon one or both of these two grounds: either because these two doctrines are

equally

equally incomprehensible, or because they are equally loaded with absurdities and contradictions.

The first is no good ground of rejecting any doctrine, merely because it is incomprehensible; as I have abundantly shewed already. But besides this, there is a wide difference between plain matters of sense, and mysteries concerning God; and it does by no means follow, that, if a man do once admit any thing concerning God which he cannot comprehend, he hath no reason afterwards to believe what he himself sees. This is a most unreasonable and destructive way of arguing, because it strikes at the foundation of all certainty, and sets every man at liberty to deny the most plain and evident truths of Christianity, if he may not be humoured in having the absurdest things in the world admitted for true. The next step will be to persuade us that we may as well deny the being of God, because his nature is incomprehensible by our reason, as deny transubstantiation, because it evidently contradicts our senses.

2dly, Nor are these two doctrines loaded with the like absurdities and contradictions: so far from this, that the doctrine of the Trinity, as it is delivered in the scriptures, and hath already been explained, hath no absurdity or contradiction either involved in it, or necessarily consequent upon it: but the doctrine of transubstantiation is big with all imaginable absurdity and contradiction. And their own schoolmen have sufficiently exposed it; especially Scotus, and he designed to do so, as any man that attentively reads him may plainly discover: for in his disputation about it he treats this doctrine with the greatest contempt, as a new invention of the council of Lateran under pope Innocent III. To the decree of which council concerning it he seems to pay a formal submission, but really derides it as contrary to the common sense and reason of mankind, and not at all supported by scripture, as any one may easily discern that will carefully consider his manner of handling it, and the result of his whole disputation about it.

And now suppose there were some appearance of absurdity and contradiction in the doctrine of the Trinity as it is delivered in scripture, must we therefore believe a doctrine which is not at all revealed in scripture, and which hath certainly in it all the absurdities in the world, and all the contradictions to sense and reason; and which once admitted, doth at once destroy all certainty? Yes, say they, why not? Since we of the church of Rome are satisfied that this doctrine is revealed in scripture; or, if it be not, is defined by the church, which is every whit as good. But is this equal, to demand of us the belief of a thing which hath always been controverted, not only between us and them, but even among themselves, at least till the council of Trent? And this upon such unreasonable terms, that we must either yield this point to them, or else renounce a doctrine agreed on both sides to be revealed in scripture.

To shew the unreasonableness of this proceeding, let us suppose a priest of the church of Rome pressing a Jew or Turk to the belief of transubstantiation; and because one kindness deserves another, the Jew or Turk should demand of him the belief of all the fables in the talmud, or in the alcoran; since none of these, nor indeed all of them together, are near so absurd as transubstantiation: would not this be much more reasonable and equal than that they demand of us? Since no absurdity, how monstrous and big soever, can be thought of, which may not enter into an understanding, in which a breach hath been already made wide enough to admit transubstantiation. The priests of Baal did not half so much deserve to be exposed by the prophet for their superstition and folly, as the priests of the church of Rome do for this senseless and stupid doctrine of theirs with a hard name. I shall only add this one thing more, that if this doctrine were possible to be true, and clearly proved to be so; yet it could be evidently useless and to no purpose. For it tends to change the substance of one thing into the substance of another thing, that is already and before this change is pretended to be made. But to what purpose?

Not

Not to make the body of CHRIST, for that was already in being; and the substance of the bread is lost, nothing of it remaineth but accidents, which are good for nothing, and indeed are nothing when the substance is destroyed and gone.

All that now remains, is to make some practical inferences from this doctrine of the unity of the divine nature. And they shall be the same which GOD himself makes by Moses, Deut. vi. 4. *Hear, O Israel, the LORD thy GOD is one LORD*: which text is also cited by our SAVIOUR, Mark xii. 29, 30, 31. *And thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. So that according to our SAVIOUR, the whole duty of man, the love of GOD and of our neighbour, is founded in the unity of the divine nature.

I. The love of GOD; *the LORD thy GOD is one LORD*, therefore *thou shalt love him with all thy heart &c. this is the first and great commandment*: and it comprehends in it all the duties of the first table as naturally flowing from it. As that we should serve him only, and pay no religious worship to any but to him. For to pay religious worship to any thing, is to make it a GOD and to acknowledge it for such: and therefore GOD being but one, we can give religious worship to none but to him only. And among all the parts of religious worship, none is more peculiarly appropriated to the deity than solemn invocation and prayer. For he to whom men address their requests at all times, and in all places, must be supposed to be always every where present, to understand all our desires and wants, and to be able to supply them; and this GOD only is and can do.

So likewise from the unity of the divine nature may be inferred, that we should not worship GOD by any sensible image or representation: because GOD being a singular being there is nothing like him, or that can be without injuring and debasing his most spiritual and perfect

and immense being be compared to him : as he himself speaks in the prophet, *Isai. xli. 5. To whom will ye liken me, saith the LORD, and make me equal ?* And therefore with no distinction whatsoever can it be lawful to give religious worship, or any part of it, to any but GOD : we can pray to none but to him, because he only is every where present, and *only knows the hearts of all the children of men, 1 Kings viii. 39.* which Solomon gives as the reason why we should address our supplications to GOD only, *who dwelleth in the heavens.*

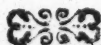
So that the reason of these two precepts is founded in the unity and singularity of the divine nature, and unless there be more gods than one, we must worship him only, and pray to none but him : because we can give invocation to none but to him only whom we believe to be GOD ; as St. Paul reasons, *Rom. x. 14. How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed ?*

II. The love likewise of our neighbour is founded in the unity of the divine nature, and may be inferred from it : *Hear, O Israel, the LORD thy GOD is one LORD, therefore thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* And the apostle gives this reason why all mankind should be at unity among themselves, *Eph. iv. 6. there is one GOD and Father of all,* and therefore we should *keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,* that is, live in mutual love and peace. The prophet likewise assigns this reason why all mankind should be upon good terms with one another, and not be injurious one to another, *Mal. ii. 10. Have we not all one Father ? Hath not one GOD created us ? Why do we then deal treacherously every man against his brother ?*

And therefore when we see such hatred and enmity among men, such divisions and animosities among Christians, we may not only ask St. Paul's question, *Is CHRIST divided ?* that we cannot agree about serving him ; either all to serve him one way, or to bear with one another in our differences ? I say we may not only ask St. Paul's question, *Is CHRIST divided ?* But may ask farther, *Is*

God divided? Is there not one GOD, and are we not all his offspring? Are we not all the sons of Adam, *who was the son of God*? So that if we trace ourselves to our original, we shall find a great nearness and equality among men: and this equality that we are all GOD's creatures and image, and that the one only GOD is the Father of us all, is a more real ground of mutual love, and peace, and equity in our dealings one with another, than any of those petty differences and distinctions of strong and weak, of rich and poor, of wise and foolish, of base and honourable, can be to encourage men to any thing of insolence, injustice, and inequality of dealing one towards another. Because that wherein we all agree, that we are the creatures and children of GOD and have all one common father, is essential and constant; but those things wherein we differ are accidental and mutable, and happen to one another by turns.

Thus much may suffice to have spoken concerning the first proposition in the text, *there is one GOD*: to him, Father, Son, and holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.



Stedfastness in Religion.

A

S E R M O N

Preached in the

Church of St. Lawrence-Jury, June 3, 1684.

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BEING, I hope, for the remainder of my life, released from that irksom and unpleasant work of controversy and wrangling about religion, I shall now turn my thoughts to something more agreeable to my temper, and of a more direct and immediate tendency to the promoting of true religion, to the happiness of human society, and the reformation of the world.

I have no intention to reflect upon any that stand up in defence of the truth, and contend earnestly for it, endeavouring in the spirit of meekness to reclaim those that are in error. For I doubt not but a very good man may, upon several occasions, be almost unavoidably engaged in controversies of religion; and if he have a head clear and cool enough, so as to be master of his own notions and temper in that hot kind of service, he may therein do considerable advantage to truth: though a man that hath once drawn blood in controversy, as

The P R E F A C E.

Mr. Mede expreffeth it, is ſeldom known ever perfectly to recover his own good temper afterwards.

For this reaſon a good man ſhould not be very willing, when his lord comes, to be found ſo doing, and as it were beating his fellow-ſervants: and all controverſy, as it is uſually managed, is little better. A good man would be loth to be taken out of the world reeking hot from a ſharp contention with a perverſe adverſary; and not a little out of countenance, to find himſelf in this temper tranſlated into the calm and peaceable regions of the bleſſed, where nothing but perfect charity and good-will reign for ever.

I know not whether St. Paul, who had been taken up into the third heavens, did by that queſtion of his, where is the diſputer of THIS WORLD? intend to inſinuate, that this wrangling work hath place only in this world, and upon this earth, where only there is a duſt to be raiſed; but will have no place in the other. But whether St. Paul intended this or not, the thing itſelf I think is true, that in the other world all things will be clear and paſt diſpute. To be ſure, among the bleſſed; and probably alſo among the miſerable, unleſs fierce and furious contentions, with great heat without light, about things of no moment and concernment to them, ſhould be deſigned for a part of their torment.

THE PREFACE.

As to the following sermons, I am sensible that the stile of them is more loose and full of words, than is agreeable to just and exact discourses: but so I think the stile of popular sermons ought to be. And therefore I have been not very careful to mend this matter; choosing rather that they should appear in that native simplicity in which, so many years ago, they were first framed, than dressed up with too much care and art. As they are, I hope, the candid and ingenuous readers will take them in good part.

And I do heartily wish, that all that are concerned in the respective duties, treated on in the following sermons, would be persuaded so to lay them to heart, as to put them effectually in practice: that how much soever the reformation of this corrupt and degenerate age in which we live is almost utterly to be despaired of, we may yet have a more comfortable prospect of future times, by seeing the foundation of a better world begun to be laid in the careful and conscientious discharge of the duties here mentioned: that by this means the generations to come may know God, and the children yet unborn may fear the LORD.

I have great reason to be sensible how fast the infirmities of age are coming upon me, and therefore must work the works of him, whose providence hath placed me in the station wherein

The P R E F A C E.

wherein I am, whilst it is day, because the night cometh when no man can work.

I knew very well, before I entered upon this great and weighty charge, my own manifold defects, and how unequal my best abilities were for the due discharge of it; but I did not feel this so sensibly as I now do every day more and more. And therefore that I might make some small amends for greater failings, I knew not how better to place the broken hours I had to spare from almost perpetual business of one kind or other, than in preparing something for the publick that might be of use to recover the decayed piety and virtue of the present age; in which iniquity doth so much abound, and the love of GOD and religion is grown so cold.

To this end I have chosen to publish these plain sermons, and to recommend them to the serious perusal and faithful practice both of the pastors and people committed to my charge; earnestly beseeching Almighty GOD, that by his blessing they may prove effectual to that good end for which they are sincerely designed.

S E R-

S E R M O N XLIX.

Concerning Resolution and Stedfastness
in Religion.

J O S H. xxiv. 15.

—*But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

AFTER Joshua had brought the people of Israel into the promised land, and settled them in the quiet possession of it, his great desire was to establish them in the true religion, namely, in the worship of the one true God, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and given them the possession of that good land, the land of Canaan.

And now finding himself weak and declining, being an hundred and ten years old, and fearing lest after his death the people should fall off from the true religion to the worship of idols, he, like a wise and good governor, considers with himself what course he had best to take to keep them firm and stedfast in their religion, and to prevent their defection to the idolatry of the nations round about them.

And to this end he calls a general assembly of all Israel, chap. xxiii. 1. that is, of the elders, and heads, and judges, and officers of the several tribes; and in a very wise and eloquent speech represents to them in what miraculous manner God had *driven out the nations before them, much greater and stronger nations than they*, and had given them their land to possess it. And, in a word, had performed punctually all that he had promised to them.

And therefore they ought to take great heed to themselves, to love God and to serve him; and if they did not, he tells them, chap. xxiii. 15. that it should come to
pass,

pass, that as all good things are come upon you which the LORD your GOD promised you, so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your GOD hath given you.

After this, he calls them together a second time, and gives them a brief historical account and deduction of the great mercies of GOD to them and their fathers, from the days of Abraham, whom he had called out from among his idolatrous kindred and countrymen, unto that day.

From the consideration of all which, he earnestly exhorts them to renew their covenant with GOD; and for his particular satisfaction, before he left the world, solemnly to promise that they would for ever serve GOD and forsake the service of idols: *Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.*

And then in the text, by a very elegant scheme of speech he does, as it were, once more set them at liberty; and, as if they had never engaged themselves to GOD by covenant before, he leaves them to their free choice: *and if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods whom your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell.*

Not that they were at liberty whether they would serve the true GOD, or not; but to insinuate to them that religion ought to be their free choice: and likewise, that the true religion hath those real advantages on its side, that it may safely be referred to any considerate man's choice: *If it seem evil unto you;* as if he had said, after all the demonstrations which GOD hath given, of his miraculous presence among you, and the mighty obligations which he hath laid upon you by bringing you out of the land of Egypt and the house of bondage, by stretching out an arm; and by driving out the nations before you, and giving you their land to possess: if after

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all this, you can think it fit to quit the service of this G O D, and to worship the idols of the nations whom you have subdued, those vanquished and baffled deities ; if you can think it reasonable so to do, but surely you cannot ; then take your choice : *If it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom you will serve.*

And to direct and encourage them to make a right choice, he declares to them his own resolution, which he hopes will also be theirs ; and as he had heretofore been their captain, so now he offers himself to be their example : but whether they will follow him or not, he for his part is fixed and immoveable in this resolution ; *But as for ME and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

In effect he tells them ; I have proposed the best religion to your choice, and I cannot but think, nay I cannot but hope, that you will all stedfastly adhere to it. It is so reasonable and wise, so much your interest and your happiness to do it. But if you should do otherwise, if you should be so weak as not to discern the truth, so wilful and so wicked as not to embrace it : though you should all make another choice, and run away from the true G O D to the worship of idols ; I for my part am stedfastly resolved what to do : in a case so manifest, in a matter so reasonable, no number, no example shall prevail with me to the contrary ; I will, if need be, stand alone in that which is so evidently and unquestionably right : and though this whole nation should revolt all at once from the worship of the true G O D, and join with the rest of the world in a false religion and in the worship of idols ; and mine were the only family left in all Israel, nay in the whole world, that continued to worship the G O D of Israel, I would still be of the same mind ; I would still persist in this resolution, and act according to it ; *as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

A resolution truly worthy of so great a prince and so good a man : in which he is a double pattern to us.

First, of the brave resolution of a good man, namely, that if there were occasion, and things were brought to that

that extremity, he would stand alone in the profession and practice of the true religion: *as for ME, I will serve the LORD.*

Secondly, of the pious care of a good father and master of a family, to train up those under his charge in the true religion and worship of GOD: *as for me and MY HOUSE, we will serve the LORD.*

I shall at this time, by GOD's assistance, treat of the first of these, namely,

I. Of the brave resolution of a good man, that if there were occasion, and things were brought to that extremity, he would stand alone in the profession and practice of GOD's true religion: *Choose you this day*, says Joshua, *whom ye will serve; but as for ME, I will serve the LORD.* Joshua here puts the case at the utmost extremity, that not only the great nations of the world, the Egyptians and Chaldeans, and all the lesser nations round about them, and in whose land they dwelt, were all long since revolted to idolatry, and pretended great antiquity and long prescription for the worship of their false gods: but he supposeth yet farther, that the only true and visible church of GOD then known in the world, the people of Israel, should likewise generally revolt and forsake the worship of the true GOD, and cleave to the service of idols: yet in this case, if we could suppose it to happen, he declares his firm and stedfast resolution to adhere to the worship of the true GOD: and though all others should fall off from it, that he would stand alone in the profession and practice of the true religion: *but as for ME, I will serve the LORD.*

In the handling of this argument I shall do these two things.

First, I shall consider the matter of this resolution, and the due bounds and limits of it.

Secondly, I shall endeavour to vindicate the reasonableness of this resolution from the objections to which this singular and peremptory kind of resolution may seem liable,

First, I shall consider the matter of this resolution, and the due bounds and limits of it.

1st. The matter of this resolution. Joshua here resolves that if need were, and things were brought to that pass, he would stand alone, or with very few adhering to him, in the profession and practice of the true religion. And this is not a mere supposition of an impossible case, which can never happen: for it may, and hath really and in fact happened in several ages and places of the world.

There hath been a general apostasy of some great part of GOD's church, from the belief and profession of the true religion to idolatry, and to damnable errors and heresies: and some good men have, upon the matter, stood alone in the open profession of the true religion, in the midst of this general defection from it.

Elijah in that general revolt of the people of Israel, when they had *forsaken the covenant of the LORD, and broken down his altars, and slain his prophets*, and he only, as he thought, was left to stand alone: I say, in this case when, as he verily believed, he had no body to stand by him, *he was very zealous for the LORD-GOD of hosts*, 1 Kings xviii. 18. and with an undaunted courage stood up for the worship of the true GOD, and reproved Ahab to his face for his defection to the worship of idols.

And those three brave youths, in the prophecy of Daniel, chap. iii. did in the like resolute and undaunted manner refuse to obey the command of the great king Nebuchadnezzar, *to worship the image which he had set up*; when all others submitted, and paid honour to it: telling him plainly, ver. 17, 18. *if it be so, our GOD whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thy hand: if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*

In like manner, and with the same spirit and courage, Daniel withstood the decree of Darius, Dan. vi. 7. which

forbad men to *ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of the king only*; and this under the pain of being cast into the den of lions: and when all others gave obedience to it, he *set open the windows of his chamber towards Jerusalem, and kneeled down upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks, as he did aforetime.* ver. 10.

In the prevalency of the Arian herefy, Athanasius almost stood alone in the profession and maintenance of the truth. And in the reign of antichrist, the true church of God is represented by a woman flying into the wilderness, and living there in obscurity for a long time; insomuch that the professors of the truth should hardly be found. And yet during that degeneracy of so great a part of the Christian church, and the prevalency of antichrist for so many ages, some few in every age did appear, who did resolutely own the truth, and bear witness to it with their blood. But these did almost stand alone and by themselves, like a few scattered sheep wandering up and down in a wide wilderness.

Thus in the height of popery, Wickliffe appeared here in England; and Hierome of Prague, and John Hufs in Germany and Bohemia. And in the beginning of the reformation, when popery had quite overrun these western parts of the world, and subdued her enemies on every side, and antichrist sat securely in the quiet possession of his kingdom; Luther arose, a bold and rough man, but a fit wedge to cleave in sunder so hard and knotty a block; and appeared stoutly against the gross errors and corruptions of the church of Rome: and for a long time stood alone, and with a most invincible spirit and courage maintained his ground, and resisted the united malice and force of antichrist and his adherents; and gave him so terrible a wound, that he is not yet perfectly healed and recovered of it.

So that for a man to stand alone, or with a very few adhering to him and standing by him, is not a mere imaginary supposition, but a case that hath really and in fact happened in several ages and places of the world. Let us then proceed to consider in the

2d Place, the due limits and bounds of this peremptory resolution. In all matters of faith and practice, which are plain and evident either from natural reason, or from divine revelation, this resolution seems to be very reasonable: but in things doubtful a modest man, and every man hath reason to be so, would be very apt to be staggered by the judgment of a very wise man; and much more of many such, and especially by the unanimous judgment of the generality of men; the general voice and opinion of mankind being next to the voice of God himself.

For in matters of an indifferent nature, which God hath neither commanded nor forbidden, such as are many of the circumstances and ceremonies of God's worship, a man would not be singular, much less stiff and immoveable in his singularity; but would be apt to yield and surrender himself to the general vote and opinion, and to comply with the common custom and practice; and much more with the rules and constitutions of authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical. Because in things lawful and indifferent, we are bound by the rules of decency and civility not to thwart the general practice; and by the commands of God, we are certainly obliged to obey the lawful commands of lawful authority.

But in things plainly contrary to the evidence of sense or reason, or to the word of God, a man would compliment no man, or number of men; nor would he pin his faith upon any church in the world; much less upon any single man, no not the pope; no, though there were never so many probable arguments brought for the proof of his infallibility.

In this case, a man would be singular and stand alone against the whole world; against the wrath and rage of a king, and all the terrors of his fiery furnace; as in other matters, a man would not believe all the learned men in the world against the clear evidence of sense and reason. If all the great mathematicians of all ages, Archimedes, and Euclid, and Apollonius, and Diophantus, &c. could

be supposed to meet together in a general council, and should there declare in the most solemn manner, and give it under their hands and seals, that twice two did not make four, but five; this would not move me in the least to be of their mind; nay, I who am no mathematician would maintain the contrary, and would persist in it without being in the least startled by the positive opinion of these great and learned men: and should most certainly conclude, that they were either all of them out of their wits, or that they were biased by some interest or other, and swayed against the clear evidence of truth, and the full conviction of their own reason to make such a determination as this. They might indeed overrule the point by their authority, but in my inward judgment I should still be where I was before.

Just so in matters of religion, if any church, though with never so glorious and confident a pretence to infallibility, should declare for transubstantiation, that is, that the bread and wine in the sacrament, by virtue of the consecration of the priest, are substantially changed into the natural body and blood of CHRIST; this is so notoriously contrary both to the sense and reason of mankind, that a man would choose to stand single in the opposition of it, and laugh at or rather pity the rest of the world, that could be so servilely blind as seemingly to conspire in the belief of so monstrous an absurdity.

And in like manner, if any church should declare, that images are to be worshipped; or that the worship of GOD is to be performed in an unknown tongue; and that the holy scriptures, which contain the word and will of GOD, and teach men what they are to believe and do in order to their eternal salvation, are to be locked up and kept concealed from the people in a language which they do not understand, lest if they were permitted the free use of them in their mother tongue, they should know more of the mind and will of GOD than is convenient for the common people to know, whose devotion and obedience to the church does mainly depend upon their ignorance: or should declare, that the sacrifice of

CHRIST

CHRIST was not offered once for all, but is and ought to be repeated ten millions of times every day : and that the people ought to receive the communion in one kind only, and the cup by no means to be trusted with them for fear the profane beads of the laity should drink of it : and that the saving efficacy of the sacraments doth depend upon the intention of the priest, without which the receiver can have no benefit by them : these are all of them so plainly contrary to scripture, and most of them in reason so absurd, that the authority of no church whatsoever can oblige a man to the belief of them.

Nay, I go yet farther, that being evidently contrary to the doctrine of the gospel, though an apostle, or an angel from heaven should declare them, we ought to reject them. And for this I have St. Paul's authority and warrant, who speaking of some that perverted the gospel of CHRIST by teaching things contrary to it, *though we, says he, Gal. i. 7, 8, 9. or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed : as we said before, so say I now again, though an apostle, though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which ye have received, let him be accursed.* You see he repeats it over again, to express not only his own confident assurance, but the certainty of the thing. And here is an anathema with a witness, which we may confidently oppose to all the anathemas which the council of Trent hath so liberally denounced against all those who shall presume to gainsay these new doctrines of their church ; which are in truth another gospel, than that which our blessed SAVIOUR and his apostles taught : and yet on their side there is neither an apostle, nor an angel from heaven in the case.

To give but one instance more : if Bellarmine shall tell me, as he expressly does, that *if the pope should declare virtue to be vice, and vice to be virtue, I were bound to believe him unless I would sin against conscience :* and if all the world should say the same that Bellarmine does, namely, that this infallible declarer of virtue and

vice were to be believed and followed; yet I could not possibly be of their mind, for this plain and undeniable reason; because if virtue and vice be all one, then religion is nothing; since the main design of religion is to teach men the difference between virtue and vice, and to oblige them to practise the one and to refrain from the other: and if religion be nothing, then heaven and hell are nothing: and if heaven be nothing, then an infallible guide thither is of no use and to no manner of purpose; because he is a guide no whither, and so his great office ceases and falls of itself.

And now lest any should think me singular in this assertion, and that thereby I give a great deal too much to the single judgment of private persons, and too little to the authority of a church, I will produce the deliberate judgment of a very learned man and a great assertor of the church's authority, concerning the matter I am now speaking of: I mean Mr. Hooker, in his deservedly admired book of ecclesiastical polity. His words are these, *I grant, says he, that proof derived from the authority of man's judgment is not able to work that assurance which doth grow by stronger proof: and therefore although ten thousand general councils should set down one and the same definitive sentence concerning any point of religion whatsoever, yet one demonstrative reason alledged, or one testimony cited from the word of GOD himself to the contrary, could not choose but overcome them all: in as much as for them to be deceived it is not so impossible, as it is that demonstrative reason or divine testimony should deceive.*

And again, *For men, says he, to be tied and led by authority, as it were with a kind of captivity of judgment, and though there be reason to the contrary not to listen to it, but follow like beasts the first in the herd, this were brutish.*

Again, *That the authority of men should prevail with men, either against or above reason, is no part of our belief. Companies of learned men, though they be never so great and reverend, are to yield unto reason, the weight whereof is no whit prejudiced by the simplicity of the per-*

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son which doth alledge it; but being found to be sound and good, the bare opinion of men to the contrary must of necessity stoop and give place. And this he delivers not only as his own particular judgment, but that which he apprehended to be the judgment of the church of England.

I have produced these clear and positive testimonies of so learned and judicious a person, and of so great esteem in our church, on purpose to prevent any misapprehension, as if by this discourse I intended to derogate from the authority of the church, and her just and reasonable determinations, in things no wise contrary to plain reason or the word of G O D. And beyond this pitch no judicious protestant, that I know of, ever strained the authority of the church. I proceed now in the

Second place, to vindicate the reasonableness of this resolution, from the objections to which this singular and peremptory kind of resolution may seem liable.

Object. 1. First, it may very speciously be said, that this does not seem modest for a man to set up his own private judgment against the general suffrage and vote. And it is very true, as I said before, that about things indifferent a man should not be stiff and singular; and in things doubtful and obscure, a man should not be overconfident of his own judgment, and insist peremptorily upon it against the general opinion: but in things that are plain and evident, either from scripture or reason, it is neither immodesty nor a culpable singularity, for a man to stand alone in defence of the truth. Because in such a case a man does not oppose his own single and private judgment to the judgment of many, but the common reason of mankind and the judgment of G O D plainly declared in his word.

If the generality of men should turn atheists and infidels, and should deny the being of G O D, or his providence; the immortality of mens souls, and the rewards and punishments of another world; or should deny the
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truth of the gospel and of the Christian religion, it would not certainly be any breach of modesty for a man to appear single, if no body else would stand by him in the resolute defence of these great truths.

In like manner when a whole church, though never so large and numerous, shall conspire together to corrupt the Christian religion so far as to impose upon mankind, under the name of Christian doctrines and articles of faith, things plainly contrary to the sense and reason of mankind, and to the clear and express word of **G O D**, why must a man needs be thought immodest, if he oppose such gross errors and corruptions of the Christian doctrine? And what reason have the church of Rome to talk of modesty in this case, when they themselves have the face to impose upon mankind the belief of things contrary to what they and every man else sees? As they do in their doctrine of transubstantiation: and to require of them to do what **G O D** hath expressly forbidden, as in the worship of images; besides a great many other idolatrous practices of that church: to deny the people the free use of the holy scriptures, and the publick service of **G O D** in a known tongue; contrary to the very end and design of all religion, and in affront to the common reason and liberty of mankind.

Object. 2. Secondly, it is pretended that it is more prudent for private persons to err with the church, than to be so pertinacious in their own opinions. To which I answer, that it may indeed be pardonable in some cases to be led into mistake by the authority of those to whose judgment and instruction we ought to pay a great deference and submission: provided always it be in things which are not plain and necessary; but surely it can never be prudent to err with any number, how great soever, in matters of religion which are of moment, merely for numbers sake: but to comply with the known errors and corruptions of any church whatsoever, is certainly damnable.

Object. 3. Thirdly, it is pretended yet farther, that men shall sooner be excused in following the church, than any

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particular man or sect. To this I answer, that it is very true if the matter be doubtful, and especially if the probabilities be equal, or near equal on both sides: but if the error be gross and palpable, it will be no excuse to have followed any number of men, or any church whatsoever. For here the competition is not between men and men, but between God and men: and in this case we must forsake all men to follow God and his truth. *Thou shalt in no wise follow a multitude in a known error*, is a rule which in reason is of equal obligation with that divine law, *thou shalt in no wise follow a multitude to do evil*; or rather is comprehended in it, because to comply with a known error is certainly to do evil.

And this very objection the Jews made against our blessed SAVIOUR and the doctrine which he taught, that the guides and governors of the Jewish church did utterly differ from him, and were of a contrary mind; *have any of the rulers, say they, believed on him?* What? will you be wiser than your rulers and governors? What? follow the doctrine of one single man against the unanimous judgment and sentence of the great sanhedrim, to whom the trial of doctrines and pretended prophets doth of right belong?

But as plausible as this objection may seem to be, it is to be considered that in a corrupt and degenerate church, the guides and rulers of it are commonly the worst, and the most deeply engaged in the errors and corruptions of it. They brought them in at first, and their successors, who have been bred up in the belief and practice of them, are concerned to uphold and maintain them: and so long a prescription gives a kind of a sacred stamp even to error, and an authority not to be opposed and resisted.

And thus it was in the corrupt state of the Jewish church, in our SAVIOUR's time: and so likewise in that great degeneracy of the Christian church, in the times of popery, their rulers made them to err: insomuch that when Martin Luther appeared in opposition to the errors and superstitions of that church, and was hard pressed with
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this very objection which the Pharisees urged against our SAVIOUR, he was forced to bolt out a kind of unman-nerly truth, *religio nunquam magis periclitatur quàm inter reverendissimos, religion, says he, is never in greater ba- zard and worse treated, than amongst the most reve- rend*: meaning the pope and his cardinals, and all the Romish hierarchy who had their dependence upon them.

Object. 4. Fourthly, it is objected, that as on the one hand there may be danger of error in following blindly the belief of the church, so on the other hand there is as great a danger of schism in forsaking the communion of the church upon pretence of errors and corruptions. Very true; but where great errors and corruptions are not only pretended, but are real and evident: and where our compliance with those errors and corruptions is made a neces- sary condition of our communion with that church: in that case, the guilt of schism, how great a crime soever it be, doth not fall upon those who forsake the commu- nion of that church, but upon those who drive them out of it by the sinful conditions which they impose upon them.

And this is truly the case between us and the church of Rome, as we are ready to make good, and have fully done it upon all occasions; and they have never yet been able to vindicate and clear themselves of those gross errors and corruptions which have been charged upon them, and which they require of all their members as necessary con- ditions of communion with them here, and of eternal salvation hereafter.

For we do not object to them doubtful matters, but things as plain as any are contained in the bible, as every body would see if they durst but let every body read it. The worship of images is there as plainly forbidden in the decalogue, as murder and adultery are. The com- munion in both kinds is as exprefs an institution of our SAVIOUR, as any in all the new testament; and even as the sacrament of the LORD's-supper itself; only that

that church pretends to a dispensing power, as a privilege inherent in their church and inseparable from it.

And, to add but one instance more; publick prayers and the service of God in an unknown tongue, are as plainly and fully declared against by St. Paul, in a long chapter upon this single argument, as any one thing in all his epistles.

These things are plain and undeniable, and being so, are a full justification not only of the church of England, in the reformation which she thought fit to make within herself from the gross errors and corruptions of the church of Rome; but likewise of particular persons who have at any time for the same reasons withdrawn themselves from her communion, in any of the popish countries: yea though that single person should happen to be in those circumstances that he could not have the opportunity of holding communion with any other church, that was free from those errors and corruptions, and which did not impose them as necessary conditions of communion.

For if any church fall off to idolatry, every good Christian not only may, but ought to forsake her communion; and ought rather to stand single and alone in the profession of the pure and true religion, than to continue in the communion of a corrupt and idolatrous church.

I know that some men are so fond of the name of a church, that they can very hardly believe that any thing which bears that glorious title can miscarry, or do any thing so much amiss as to give just occasion to any of her members to break off from her communion. What? the church err? That is such an absurdity, as is by many thought sufficient to put any objection out of countenance. That the whole church, that is, that all the Christians in the world should at any time fall off to idolatry and into errors and practices directly contrary to the Christian doctrine revealed in the holy scriptures, is on all hands, I think, denied: but that any particular church may fall into such errors and practices is, I think, as universally granted:

granted: only in this case they demand to have the Roman catholick church excepted: and why I pray? Because though the Roman church is a particular church, it is also the universal church; if this can be, and good sense can be made of a particular universal church, then the Roman church may demand this high privilege of being exempted from the fate of all other churches; but if the Roman catholick, that is the particular universal church be a gross and palpable contradiction, then it is plain that the church of Rome hath no more pretence to this privilege, than any other particular church whatsoever.

And which is yet more, some men talk of these matters at that rate, as if a man, who thought himself obliged to quit the communion of the church of Rome, should happen to be in those circumstances that he had no opportunity of joining himself to any other communion, he ought in that case to give over all thoughts of religion, and not be so conceited and presumptuous as to think of going to heaven alone by himself.

It is without doubt a very great sin to despise the communion of the church, or to break off from it so long as we can continue in it without sin: but if things should once come to that pass, that we must either disobey God for company, or stand alone in our obedience to him, we ought most certainly to obey God whatever comes of it; and to profess his truth, whether any body else will join with us in that profession or not.

And they who speak otherwise condemn the whole reformation, and do in effect say that Martin Luther had done a very ill thing in breaking off from the church of Rome, if no body else would have joined with him in that honest design. And yet if it had been so, I hope God would have given him the grace and courage to have stood alone in so good and glorious a cause, and to have laid down his life for it.

And for any man to be of another opinion, is just as if a man upon great deliberation should choose rather to be drowned, than to be saved either by a plan

or a small boat; or to be carried into the harbour any other way, than in a great ship of so many hundred tuns.

In short, a good man must resolve to obey G O D and to profess his truth, though all the world should happen to do otherwise. C H R I S T hath promised to preserve his church *to the end of the world*, that is, he hath engaged his word that he will take care there shall always be, in some part of the world or other, some persons that shall make a sincere profession of his true religion.

But he hath no where promised to preserve any one part of his church from such errors and corruptions, as may oblige all good men to quit the communion of that part; yea, though when they have done so, they may not know whither to resort for actual communion with any other sound part of the Christian church. As it happened to some particular persons, during the reign and rage of popery in these western parts of the Christian church.

The result from all this discourse is, to confirm and establish us all, in this *hour of temptation* and of the *powers of darknes*, in the well-grounded belief of the necessity and justice of our reformation from the errors and corruptions of the Roman church. And to engage us *to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*: and not only to profess and promise as Peter did to our LORD, *though all men forsake thee, yet will not I*: but if there should be occasion, to perform and make good this promise with the hazard of all that is dear to us, and even of life itself. And whatever trials G O D may permit any of us to fall into, to take up the pious resolution of Joshua here in the text, that whatever others do, *we will serve the LORD*.

I will conclude my discourse, upon this first particular in the text, with the exhortation of St. Paul to the Philippians, chap. i. ver. 27. *only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of CHRIST. Stand fast in one spirit, be of one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel*:

in nothing terrified by your adversaries, which to them is an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of GOD.

And thus much may suffice to have spoken to the first thing in the text, namely, the pious resolution of Joshua, that if there were occasion and things were brought to that extremity, he would stand alone in the profession and practice of GOD's true religion: *choose you this day whom ye will serve, but as for me, I will serve the LORD.*

I should now have proceeded to the second thing, and which indeed I chiefly intended to speak to from this text, namely, the pious care of a good father and master of a family, to train up those under his charge in the religion and worship of the true GOD, *as for me and MY HOUSE, we will serve the LORD.* But this I shall not now enter upon, but defer it to some other opportunity. *Consider what ye have heard, and the LORD give you understanding in all things.*



S E R M O N L.

Concerning Family-Religion.

Preached at St. Lawrence-Jury,
July 13, 1684.

J O S H. XXIV. 15.

—*But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

I SHALL now proceed to the second point contained in the text, namely,

II. The pious care of a good master and father of a family, to train up those under his charge in the worship and service of the true G O D : *as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

And this is the more necessary to be spoken to, because it is a great and very essential part of religion, but strangely overlooked and neglected in this loose and degenerate age in which we live. It is a great part of religion ; for next to our personal homage and service to Almighty G O D , and the care of our own souls, it is incumbent upon us to make those, who are under our charge and subject to our authority, G O D 's subjects, and his children and servants ; which is a much more honourable and happy relation, than that which they bear to us.

Our children are a natural part of ourselves, and the rest of our family are a civil and political part : and not only we ourselves, but all that we have and that belongs to us is G O D 's, and ought to be devoted to his service. And they that have the true fear of G O D themselves, will be careful to teach it to others ; to those especially

who are under their more immediate care and instruction. And therefore **G O D** had so great a confidence concerning Abraham as to this particular, as to undertake for him, that being so very good a man himself, he would not fail in so great and necessary a part of his duty. *For I know him*, says **G O D** of him, *that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the word of the LORD, to do justice and judgment.* **G O D** passeth his word for him, that he would not only take care to instruct his children and the rest of his numerous family in the true religion, but that he would likewise lay a strict charge upon them to propagate and transmit it to their posterity.

And this certainly is the duty of all fathers and masters of families; and an essential part of religion, next to serving **G O D** in our own persons, to be very careful that all that belong to us do the same. For every man must not only give an account of himself to **G O D**, but of those likewise that are committed to his charge, that they do not miscarry through his neglect.

In speaking of this great and necessary duty, I shall do these four things.

First, I shall shew wherein it doth consist.

Secondly, I shall consider our obligation to it, both in point of duty and of interest.

Thirdly, I shall enquire into the causes of the so common and shameful neglect of this duty, to the exceeding great decay of piety amongst us.

Fourthly, as a motive and argument to us to endeavour to retrieve the practice of this duty, I shall represent to you the pernicious consequences of the neglect of it, both with regard to ourselves and to the publick. In all which I shall be very brief, because things that are plain need not to be long.

I. I shall shew wherein the practice of this duty doth consist. And in this I am sure there is no need to be long, because this duty is much better known than practised. The principal parts of it are these following.

First,

First, by setting up the constant worship of GOD in our families. By daily prayers to GOD, every morning and evening; and by reading some portion of the holy scriptures at those times, especially out of the psalms of David, and the new testament. And this is so necessary to keep alive and to maintain a sense of GOD and religion in the minds of men, that where it is neglected I do not see how any family can in reason be esteemed a family of Christians, or indeed to have any religion at all.

And there are not wanting excellent helps to this purpose for those that stand in need of them, as I think most families do for the due and decent discharge of this solemn duty of prayer: I say, there are excellent helps to this purpose, in the several books of devotion calculated for the private use of families, as well as for secret prayers in our closets.

So that besides the reading of the holy scriptures, which are the great fountains of divine truth; we may do well likewise to add to these other pious and profitable books, which by their plainness are fitted for the instruction of all capacities in the most necessary points of belief and practice: of which sort, GOD be thanked, there is an abundant store; but none that I think is more fitted for general and constant use, than that excellent book so well known by the title of *the whole duty of man*: because it is conveniently divided into parts or sections; one of which may be read in the family, at any time when there is leisure for it; but more especially on the LORD'S day, when the whole family may the more easily be brought and kept together, and have the opportunity to attend upon these things without distraction.

And, which I must by no means omit, because it is in many families already gone, and in others going out of fashion: I mean a solemn acknowledgment of the providence of GOD, by begging his blessing at our meals, upon his good creatures provided for our use; and by returning thanks to him for the benefit and refreshment of them: this being a piece of natural religion owned and practised in all ages, and in most places of the world;

but never so shamefully and scandalously neglected, and I fear by many slighted and despised, as it is amongst us at this day: and most neglected where there is greatest reason for the doing of it, I mean at the most plentiful tables, and among those of highest quality: as if great persons were ashamed, or thought scorn to own from whence these blessings come; like the nation of the Jews, of whom GOD complains in the prophet, *Hos. ii. 8. she knew not that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold: she knew not, that is, she would not acknowledge from whose bounty all these blessings came: or, as if the poor were obliged to thank GOD for a little, but those who are fed to the full, and whose cups overflow, so that they are almost every day surfeited of plenty, were not at least equally bound to make returns of thankful acknowledgment to the great giver of all good things; and to implore his bounty and blessing, upon whom the eyes of all do wait, that he may give them their meat in due season.*

O crooked and perverse generation! Do you thus reason? Do ye thus requite the LORD, foolish and unwise? This is a very sad and broad sign of the prevalency of atheism and infidelity among us, when so natural and so reasonable a piece of religion, so meet and equal an acknowledgment of the constant and daily care and providence of almighty GOD towards us, begins to grow out of date and use; in a nation professing religion, and the belief of the being and providence of GOD. Is it not a righteous thing with GOD to take away his blessings from us, when we deny him this just and easy tribute of praise and thanksgiving? Shall not GOD wist for this horrible ingratitude? And shall not his soul be avenged on such a nation as this? Hear, O heavens, and be ye horribly astonished at this! I hope it cannot be thought misbecoming the meanest of GOD's ministers, in a matter wherein the honour of GOD is so nearly concerned, to reprove, even in the highest and greatest of the sons of men, so shameful and heinous a fault, with a proportionable vehemence and severity.

Secondly,

Secoudly, another, and that also a very considerable part of this duty, consists in instructing those committed to our charge in the fundamental principles, and in the careful practice of the necessary duties of religion; instilling these into children in their tender years, as they are capable of them, *line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little*; and into those that are more grown up, by proper and suitable means of instruction, and by furnishing them with such books as are most proper to teach them those things in religion, which are most necessary by all to be believed and practised.

And in order hereunto we should take care that those under our charge, our children and servants, should be taught to read, because this will make the business of instruction much easier; so that if they are diligent and well-disposed they may, after having been taught the first principles of religion, by reading the holy scriptures and other good books, greatly improve themselves, so as to be prepared to receive much greater benefit and advantage by the publick teaching of their ministers.

And in this work of instruction, our great care should be to plant those principles of religion in our children and servants, which are most fundamental and necessary, and are like to have the greatest and most lasting influence upon their whole lives: as right and worthy apprehensions of God, especially of his infinite goodness, and that *he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*: and a lively sense also of the great evil and danger of sin: a firm belief of the immortality of our souls, and of the unspeakable and endless rewards and punishments of another world. If these principles once take root, they will spread strangely, and probably stick by them and continue with them all their days.

Whereas if we plant in them doubtful doctrines and opinions, and inculcate upon them the notions of a sect, and the jargon of a party, this will turn to a very pitiful account, and we must expect that our harvest will be answerable

swerable to our husbandry : *we have sown the wind, and shall reap the whirlwind.* But of this I shall have occasion to speak more particularly and fully in the ensuing sermons concerning the good education of children.

And this work of instruction of those that are under our charge, as it ought not to be neglected at other times, so it is more peculiarly seasonable on the LORD'S day, which ought to be employed by us to religious purposes, and in the exercises of piety and devotion : chiefly in the publick worship and service of GOD, upon which we should take care that our children and servants should diligently and devoutly attend. Because there GOD affords the means which he hath appointed for the begetting and increasing of piety and goodness, and to which he hath promised a more especial blessing : there they will have the opportunity of joining in the publick prayers of GOD'S church, and of sharing in the unspeakable benefit and advantage of them : and there they will also have the advantage of being instructed by the ministers of GOD in the doctrine of salvation, and the way to eternal life ; and of being powerfully incited to the practice of piety and virtue.

There likewise they will be invited to the LORD'S table, to participate of the holy sacrament of CHRIST'S most blessed body and blood ; which being the most solemn institution of the Christian religion, the frequent participation whereof is by our blessed LORD, in remembrance of his dying love, enjoined upon all Christians, we ought to take a very particular care that those who are under our charge, so soon as they are capable of it, be duly instructed and prepared for it ; that so, as often as opportunity is offered for it, they may be present at this holy action, and partake of the inestimable benefits and comforts of it.

And when the publick worship of that day is over, our families should be instructed at home, by having the scriptures and other good books read to them ; and care likewise should be taken that they do this themselves ;

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selves; this being the chief opportunity that most of them, especially those that are servants, have of minding the business of religion, and thinking seriously of another world.

And therefore I cannot but think it of very great consequence to the maintaining and keeping alive of religion in the world, that this day be religiously observed, and spent as much as may be in the exercises of piety, and in the care of our souls. For surely every one that hath a true sense of religion, will grant that it is necessary that some time should be solemnly set apart for this purpose, which is of all other our greatest concernment: and they who neglect this so proper season and opportunity, will hardly find any other time for it: especially those who are under the government and command of others, as children and servants, who are seldom upon any other day allowed to be so much masters of their time, as upon this day.

Thirdly, I add farther, as a considerable part of the duty of parents and masters of families, if they be desirous to have their children and servants religious in good earnest, and would set them forward in the way to heaven, that they do not only allow them time and opportunity, but that they do also strictly and earnestly charge them to retire themselves every day, but more especially on the LORD'S day, morning and evening, to pray to GOD for the forgiveness of their sins, and for his mercy and blessing upon them; and likewise to praise him for all his favours and benefits conferred upon them from day to day.

And in order to this, they ought to take care that their children and servants be furnished with such short forms of prayer and praise, as are proper and suitable to their capacities and conditions respectively; because there are but very few that know how to set about and perform these duties, especially at first, without some helps of this kind.

Fourthly and lastly, another principal part of this duty consists in giving good example to our families. This was
David's

David's resolution, Psal. ci. 2. *I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way, I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.* Take great care to be exemplary to thy family in the best things; in a constant and devout serving of G O D, and in a sober and prudent and unblameable conversation.

One of the best and most effectual ways to make those, who are under our care and authority, good, is to be good ourselves, and by our good example to shew them the way to be so. Without this our best instructions will signify but very little, and the main force and efficacy of them will be lost. We undermine the best instructions we can give, when they are not seconded and confirmed by our own example and practice. The want of this will weaken the authority of all our good counsel, and very little reverence and obedience will be paid to it. The precepts and admonitions of a very good man have in them a great power of persuasion, and are apt strongly to move and to inflame others to *go and do likewise*: but the good instructions of a bad man are languid and faint, and of very little force; because they give no heart and encouragement to follow that counsel, which they see he that gives it does not think fit to take himself. But of this likewise I shall have occasion to speak more fully in the following discourses concerning the good education of children. And thus much may suffice to have spoken of the first thing which I proposed, namely, wherein the practice of this duty doth consist. I proceed to the second, namely,

II. To consider our obligation to it, both in point of duty and of interest.

First, in point of duty. All authority over others is a talent intrusted with us by G O D for the benefit and good of others; and for which we are accountable, if we do not improve it and make use of it to that end. We are obliged by all lawful means to provide for the temporal welfare of our family, to feed and clothe their bodies, and to give them a comfortable subsistence here in the

the world: and surely much more are we obliged to take care of their souls, and to consult their eternal happiness in another life; in comparison of which all temporal concerns and considerations are as nothing.

It would be accounted a very barbarous thing in a father or master to suffer a child to starve for want of the necessaries of life, food and raiment, and all the world would cry shame upon them for it: but how much greater cruelty must it in reason be thought to let an immortal soul, and one for whom CHRIST died, perish for want of knowledge and necessary instruction for the attaining of eternal salvation?

The apostle St. Paul thinks no words bad enough for those who neglect the temporal welfare of their families, *be that provideth not*, saith he, *for his own, especially for those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*; that is, he does not deserve the name of a Christian, who neglects a duty to which from the plain dictates of nature a heathen thinks himself obliged. What then shall be said for them who take no care to provide for the everlasting happiness, and to prevent the eternal misery and ruin of those who are so immediately under their charge, and so very nearly related to them?

We are obliged to procure the happiness of our children not only by the laws of Christianity, but likewise by all the natural bonds of duty and affection. For our children are a part of ourselves, and if they perish by our fault and neglect, it will be a perpetual wound and sting to us; their blood will be upon our heads, and the guilt of it will for ever lie at our doors.

Nay, we are obliged likewise in justice, and by way of reparation, to take all possible care of their happiness; for we have conveyed a sad inheritance to them, in those corrupt and evil inclinations which they have derived from us: and therefore we should with the greatest care and diligence endeavour to rectify their perverse natures, and to cure those cursed dispositions to evil which we have trans-

transmitted to them : and since G O D hath been pleased in so much mercy to provide, by the abundant grace of the gospel, so powerful a remedy for this hereditary disease of our corrupt and degenerate nature, we should do what in us lies, that they may partake of the blessing and benefit of it.

And as to other members of our family, whether they be servants, or other relations of whom we have taken the charge ; common humanity will oblige us to be concerned for their happiness as they are men, and of the same nature with ourselves ; and charity likewise, as they are Christians and baptised into the same faith, and capable of the same common salvation, does yet more strictly oblige us by all means to endeavour that they may be made partakers of it ; especially since they are committed to our care, and for that reason we must expect to be accountable to G O D for them.

So that our obligation in point of duty is very clear and strong, and if we be remiss and negligent in the discharge of it we can never answer it either to G O D, or to our own consciences : which I hope will awaken us all who are concerned in it to the serious consideration of it, and effectually engage us for the future to the faithful and conscientious performance of it.

Secondly, we are hereto likewise obliged in point of interest ; because it is really for our service and advantage that those that belong to us should serve and fear G O D : religion being the best and surest foundation of the duties of all relations, and the best caution and security for the true discharge and performance of them.

Would we have dutiful and obedient children, diligent and faithful servants ? Nothing will so effectually oblige them to be so, as the fear of G O D and the principles of religion firmly settled and rooted in them. Abraham, who by the testimony of G O D himself was so eminent an example in this kind, both of a good father and a good master of his family, found the good success of his religious care in the happy effects of it, both upon his son Isaac, and his chief servant and steward of his house, Eliezer of Damascus.

What

What an unexampled instance of the most profound respect and obedience to the commands of his father did Isaac give, when without the least murmuring or reluctance he submitted to be bound and laid upon the altar, and to have been slain for a sacrifice; if God had not, by an angel sent on purpose, interposed to prevent it?

What an admirable servant to Abraham was the steward of his house, Eliezer of Damascus? How diligent and faithful was he in his master's service? So that he trusted him in his greatest concerns and with all that he had. And when he employed him in that great affair of the marriage of his son Isaac, what pains did he take, what prudence did he use, what fidelity did he shew in the discharge of that great trust, giving himself no rest till he had accomplished the business he was sent about? God seems purposely to have left these two instances upon record in scripture, to encourage fathers and masters of families to a religious care of their children and servants.

And to shew the power of religion to oblige men to their duty, I will add but one instance more. How did the fear of God secure Joseph's fidelity to his master, in the case of a very great and violent temptation? When there was nothing else to restrain him from so lewd and wicked an act, and to which he was so powerfully tempted, the consideration of the great trust his master reposed in him and the sense of his duty to him, but above all the fear of God preserved him from consenting to so vile and wicked an action, *how can I*, says he, *do this great wickedness and sin against God?*

So that in prudence, and from a wise consideration of the great benefit and advantage which will thereby redound to us, we ought with the greatest care to instil the principles of religion into those that belong to us. For if the seeds of true piety be sown in them, we shall reap the fruits of it: and if this be neglected, we shall certainly find the mischief and inconvenience of it. If our children and servants be not taught to fear and reverence God, how can we expect that they should reverence and regard us? At least we can have no sure hold of them. For

nothing but religion lays an obligation upon conscience, nor is there any other certain bond of duty and obedience and fidelity : men will break loose from all other ties when a fit occasion and a fair opportunity doth strongly tempt them. And as religion is necessary to procure the favour of God, and all the comfort and happiness which that brings along with it, so it is necessary likewise to secure the mutual duties and offices of men to one another. I proceed to the third thing which I propos'd, namely,

III. To enquire into the causes of the so common and shameful neglect of this duty, to the exceeding great decay of piety among us. And this may in part be ascribed to our civil confusions and distractions, but chiefly to our dissensions and differences in religion, which have not only divided and scattered our parochial churches and congregations, but have entred likewise into our families, and made great disturbances and disorders there.

First, this may in good part be ascribed to our civil confusions and distractions, which for the time do lay all laws asleep, and do not only occasion a general licentiousness and dissoluteness of manners, but have usually a proportionable bad influence upon the order and government of families ; by weakning the authority of those that govern, and by giving the opportunity of greater license to those that should be governed : for when publick laws lose their authority, it is hard to maintain and keep up the strict rules and orders of families, which after a great and long disorder are very hard to be retrieved and recovered.

Secondly, this great neglect and decay of religious order in families is chiefly owing to our dissensions and differences in religion, upon occasion whereof many under the pretence of conscience have broke loose into a boundless liberty. So that among the manifold ill consequences of our divisions in religion this is none of the least, that the religious order of families hath been in a great measure broken

broken and dissolved. Some will not meet at the same prayer in the family, nor go to the same church and place of publick worship; and upon that pretence take the liberty to do what they please, and under colour of serving God in a different way according to their consciences, do either wholly or in great measure neglect the worship of God; nay, it is well if they do not at that time haunt and frequent places of debauchery and lewdness; which they may safely do, being from under the eye of their parents and masters: however, by this means it becomes impossible for the most careful masters of families, to take an account of those under their charge, how they spend their time on the LORD'S-DAY, and to train them up in any certain and orderly way of religion.

And this methinks is so great and sensible an inconvenience, and hath had such dismal effects in many families, as ought effectually to convince us of the necessity of endeavouring a greater union in matters of religion; and to put us in mind of those happy days when God was served in one way, and whole families went to the house of God in companies; and fathers and masters had their children and servants continually under their eye, and they were all united in their worship and devotion, both in their own houses, and in the house of God; and by this means the work of religious education and instruction was effectually carried on, and a steady authority and decent order was maintained in families; men were edified and built up in religion, and God in all things was glorified.

And we may assure ourselves, that till we are better agreed in matters of religion, and our unhappy and childish differences are laid aside; and till the publick and unanimous worship of God do in some measure recover its reputation, the good order and government of families as to the great ends of religion is never likely to obtain and to have any considerable effect. Which I hope will make all men who heartily love God and religion, to consider seriously how necessary it is to put an end to these differences; that in our private families, as well as in the

publick assemblies of the church, we may *with one mind and with one mouth glorify GOD, even the Father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.*

I beseech you therefore, brethren, as St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians, 1 Cor. i. 10. by the name of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment; that is, so far as is necessary to the keeping of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and to prevent divisions and separations among Christians. I proceed to the fourth and last thing I proposed, and which remains to be very briefly spoken to, namely,

IV. The very mischievous and fatal consequences of the neglect of this duty, both to the publick, and to ourselves.

First, to the publick. Families are the first seminaries of religion, and if care be not there taken to prepare persons, especially in their tender years, for publick teaching and instruction, it is like to have but very little effect. The neglect of a due preparation of our children and servants at home, to make them capable of profiting by what they hear and may learn at church, is like an error in the first concoction which can hardly ever be corrected afterwards. So that in this first neglect the foundation of an infinite mischief is laid; because if no care be taken of persons in their younger years, when they are most capable of the impressions of religion, how can it reasonably be expected that they should come to good afterwards? And if they continue void of the fear of GOD, which there hath been no care taken to plant in them, they will almost necessarily be bad in all relations; undutiful children, slothful and unfaithful servants, scandalous members of the church, unprofitable to the commonwealth, disobedient to governors both ecclesiastical and civil; and in a word, burdens of the earth, and so many plagues of human society: and this evil, if

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no remedy be applied to it, will continually grow worse, and diffuse and spread itself farther in every age, till impiety and wickedness, infidelity and profaneness have overrun all, and the world be ripe for its final ruin: just as it was before the destruction of the old world, when *the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and all flesh had corrupted their way, then the flood came and swept them all away.*

Secondly, the consequences of this neglect will likewise be very dismal to ourselves. We shall first of all others feel the inconvenience, as we had the greatest share in the guilt of it. We can have no manner of security of the duty and fidelity of those of our family to us, if they have no sense of religion, no fear of God before their eyes. If we have taken no care to instruct them in their duty to God, it is no wise probable that they will make conscience of their duty to us.

So that we shall have the first ill consequences of their miscarriage, besides the shame and sorrow of it: and not only so, but all the evil they commit ever after, will be in a great measure chargeable upon us, and will be put upon our score in the judgment of the great day. It ought to make us tremble to think with what bitterness and rage our children and servants will then fly in our faces, for having been the cause of their eternal ruin, for want of due care on our part to prevent it. In that day, next to God and our own consciences, our most terrible accusers will be those of our own house, nay those that came out of our own bowels, and were not only part of our family, but even of ourselves. But this also I shall have a proper occasion to prosecute more fully in the following discourses concerning the education of children, to which I refer it.

Upon all these considerations and many more that might be urged upon us, we should take up the pious resolution of Joshua here in the text, that *we and our HOUSES will serve the LORD*: and that through God's grace, we will do all that in us lies by our future care and diligence to repair our former neglects in this kind.

I shall only add this one consideration more to all that I have already mentioned: if children were carefully educated, and families regularly and religiously ordered, what a happy and delightful place, what a paradise would this world be, in comparison of what now it is?

I beseech you therefore, brethren, that these things which I have with so much plainness and faithfulness laid before you, may sink into your hearts, before it be too late, and whilst the thing may be remedied; that you may not for ever lament this neglect and repent of it, when the thing will be past remedy, and there will be no place for repentance. *But I hope better things of you, brethren, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak.*



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